

THE ANTIC DEATH:
RESTORATION AND SHAKESPEARE'S COMIC-TRAGIC SYNTHESIS

BY

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In Memory of
Tommy Ruth Waldo

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... | iii |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | viii |
| ABSTRACT..... | x |
| CHAPTERS | |
| I SHAKESPEARE'S ANTIC DEATH: AN INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Notes..... | 31 |
| II RE-CREATIVE DESTRUCTION: COMIC-TRAGIC FUSION IN THE EARLY COMEDIES..... | 36 |
| Notes..... | 49 |
| III "GRAVES YAWN AND YIELD YOUR DEAD": DEATH, HUMOR, AND THE CRISIS OF FAITH IN <u>MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING</u> | 52 |
| Notes..... | 73 |
| IV FOOLISH KNAVERY: COMIC EVIL IN THE TRAGICOMEDIES..... | 75 |
| Notes..... | 80 |
| V "SO THERE'S MY RIDDLE: ONE THAT'S DEAD IS QUICK--": THE RIDDLER DEATH IN <u>ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL</u> | 82 |
| Notes..... | 102 |
| VI "I SWEAR I WILL NOT DIE TO-DAY FOR ANY MAN'S PERSUASION": MORTAL REFLECTIONS IN <u>MEASURE FOR MEASURE</u> | 103 |
| Notes..... | 137 |
| VII "HORN-PYPES AND FUNERALLS": SUGGESTIONS OF HOPE IN THE TRAGEDIES..... | 139 |
| Notes..... | 156 |

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| VIII | "THIS MIGHT BE THE PATE OF A POLITICIAN, WHICH THIS ASS O'ERREACHES, ONE THAT WOULD CIRCUMVENT GOD . . . ": SATURNALIAN SACRIFICE IN SHAKESPEARE'S <u>HAMLET</u> | 159 |
| | Notes..... | 182 |
| IX | "JOY OF THE WORM": REDEEMING PLAY IN SHAKESPEARE'S <u>ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA</u> | 184 |
| | Notes..... | 205 |
| X | LAUGHTER AND OUR IMPERILED CHILD: THE RETURN OF SPRING IN THE LATE COMEDIES..... | 206 |
| | Notes..... | 228 |
| XI | "FREEDOM, HIGH-DAY! HIGH-DAY, FREEDOM!": CIRCLES OF FREEDOM IN <u>THE TEMPEST</u> | 229 |
| | Notes..... | 264 |
| | BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 266 |
| | BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH..... | 275 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| <u>Figure</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| 1 George Wither, "This Ragge of Death" from <u>A Collection of Emblemes</u> (1624)..... | 2 |
| 2 George Wither, "Death is no Losse" from <u>A Collection of Emblemes</u> (1624)..... | 4 |
| 3 Hans Holbein, "The Emperor" from <u>The Dance of Death</u> (1538)..... | 17 |
| 4 "The Daunce and Song of Death," illustration accompanying a ballad by John Audeley (1596)..... | 23 |
| 5 Antiochenus' Son Looks on His Father's Grave, an anonymous illustrated poem (15th century)..... | 68 |
| 6 The Three Living and the Three Dead, a detail from a fresco in the Camposanto, Pisa (c. 1350)..... | 113 |
| 7 The Three Living and the Three Dead, from the <u>Psalter of Robert de Lisle</u> (end of first quarter, 14th century).... | 114 |
| 8 Babuinares: a-b. Details from the Gorleston Psalter (c.1305); c. The Monkey Waggoner from the Luttrell Psalter (c. 1340)..... | 127 |
| 9 Jean Fouquet, "Martyrdom of St. Appolonia," <u>The Hours of Etienne Chevalier</u> (15th century)..... | 133 |
| 10 Hans Holbein, "The Queen" from <u>Dance of Death</u> (1538)..... | 146 |
| 11 The Harrowing of Hell from <u>The St. Albans Psalter</u> (12th century)..... | 150 |
| 12 The Harrowing of Hell, detail from an initial of <u>The St. Albans Psalter</u> (12th century)..... | 151 |
| 13 Vado Mori, an anonymous poem (15th century)..... | 153 |
| 14 Hans Holbein, <u>Portrait of Sir Brian Tuke</u> from Munich Pinakothek..... | 155 |

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 15 | Giovanni Francesco Guercino, <u>Et in Arcadia Ego</u> , Rome Galleria Corsini (1621-23)..... | 212 |
| 16 | Nicholas Poussin, <u>Et in Arcadia Ego</u> , Chatsworth, England, Devonshire Collection (1629-30)..... | 213 |
| 17 | Nicholas Poussin, <u>Et in Arcadia Ego</u> , Paris, Louvre (1640)..... | 214 |
| 18 | Honoré Fragonard, <u>The Tomb</u> (drawing), Vienna, Albertina..... | 218 |
| 19 | Boticelli, detail from <u>Coronation of the Virgin</u> , Uffizi, Florence..... | 241 |
| 20 | Matteo di Giovanni, <u>Madonna with the Girdle</u> , The National Gallery, London..... | 242 |
| 21 | Woodcut from Hartman Schedel, <u>Buch der Chroniken</u> (1493).... | 244 |

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My study treats the regenerative implications of death's fusion with humor in Shakespeare's plays and includes detailed discussions of Much Ado About Nothing, All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Hamlet, Antony and Cleopatra, and The Tempest. Drama, poetry, prose, and art of the late middle ages and the early renaissance provide a context for my interpretations. The lively skulls and dancing skeletons that pervade the art and literature of the day were not merely reminders of a grim, implacable future, but were compelling instruments of self-knowledge. The aim of the memento mori was to banish complacency, induce humility, and bring the viewer to faith. So too in Shakespeare's plays, death and self-knowledge are often linked. In the comedies, mock-deaths, death threats, and occasionally real deaths encourage characters to admit their own limitations. The play, however, challenges not only the characters but also the audience to spiritual growth. Our sense of renewal

derives both from our sympathy for the characters as they encounter death and from the magical power of laughter. Like the hero, we must sense our vulnerability and learn the lesson of faith. The test of our faith is our willingness to accept the fallen hero back into the comic fold. This becomes increasingly difficult, however, as we move from the early comedies to the tragicomedies, for the hero's crimes become more deplorable and death becomes a genuine threat. Unlike the profusion of sportive frolic in the comedies and tragicomedies, mirth usually enters Shakespeare's tragedies at rare and unexpected moments. The striking change in tone at the entry of buffoons, such as Hamlet's gravediggers, suggests that we stand at an important juncture of the play. Although formerly secure, the protagonist has now assumed the vulnerable role of the scapegoat. By first encouraging our sympathies for the hero or heroine and then by distancing us from him or her, the clown's jibes contribute to our release from death. The clowns prepare us to accept the unavoidable calamity that awaits the protagonist and simultaneously to anticipate the sense of freedom that this death makes possible. Like the tragedies, the late comedies also integrate abusive and joyous laughter, and as in the tragedies, the mixture points towards the monarch's psychological death and towards our self-knowledge and regeneration. The Tempest thus takes from the tragedies the descent theme and from the early comedies the comical subplot that promises freedom and joy. This final play provides the fullest realization of Shakespeare's development of tragic-comic synthesis.

CHAPTER I
SHAKESPEARE'S ANTIC DEATH: AN INTRODUCTION

As riveting and haunting as Mona Lisa's smile is the fleshless grin of Death that appears time and time again in art from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. That Death's grimace often expresses scorn and mockery is indisputable. In George Wither's emblem, "This Ragge of Death," for example, the poem explains the grim meaning of the skeleton's smile, ". . . and marke what uglinesse / Stares through the sightlesse Eye-holes, from within: Note those leane Craggs, and with what Gastlinesse, That horrid Countenance doth seeme to grin" (Fig. 1).¹ Death's scoffing smile starkly underscores life's transience and our own foolishness when we trust in life's illusion of permanence. The meaning of Death's smile is often more complex, however, evoking not only a sense of mockery, a stark reminder of our inescapable destiny but also of gaiety and joy as well. Wither's "Death is no Losse" provides an example of the skull that both jeers and celebrates. The scene places in the foreground a large skull poised upright on an hourglass. In its eye sockets, the crevices of its temples, and the corners of its mouth, long strands of wheat protrude as though they are growing from the head. As the hourglass supports the skull to indicate life's brevity, a glowing candle stands upon the skull, illuminating the

*This Ragge of Death, which thou shalt see,
Consider it; And Pious bee.*



Fig. 1. George Wither, "This Ragge of Death" from A Collection of Emblemes (1624)

entire scene with its brilliance. While the hourglass and the candle pull together the ideas of death and life, so too do the two background vistas. The scene on the left shows a bleak city and a procession of mourners delivering a casket for burial. On the right, a pleasant country scene suggests life's simple joys. A cottage, with smoke rising gently from its chimney, sits comfortably on a hill. In front of the cottage, workers are shown busily harvesting wheat. The accompanying poem clarifies the meaning of this smiling death's head. Like the wheat, the poem explains, we must lie in the earth a while, "But, from that Wombe receives another Birth, / And, with Additions, riseth from the Clay." The grave then becomes not "Place of Feare" but rather a "Bed of Rest" (Fig. 2).² This memento mori thus serves not only as a reminder of death but also as a reminder of the bliss that awaits us beyond the grave.

Like this emblem's hopeful message, Shakespeare's plays often blend death with the comical so as to suggest an unquenchable life force whose energy either emerges at moments of intense tragic awareness or develops within a comic context into a transforming and creative power. This paradoxical union of death and life finds an analogue in the comedy of Christian redemption in medieval and renaissance thought. For death not only provides a portal to eternal life and an agon to test sincerity of belief, but also, by showing people their own nature, death encourages the requisites of remorse, humility, and faith. Thus the medieval preoccupation with bodily decomposition reveals not merely morbid sensuality but a desire to reify spiritual awareness. An anonymous work entitled "A Sermon of



Fig. 2. George Wither, "Death is no Loose" from A Collection of Emblemes (1624)

the Misery of Mankind" explains that, for the faithful "bodily death is a door or entering unto Life, and therefore not so much dreadful (if it be rightly considered,) as it is comfortable; not a mischief but a Remedy for all mischief . . . not a Sorrow and Pain, but to Joy and Pleasure."³ By thinking on the grave, the faithful realize the duality of their natures: for they share with beasts the inevitability of death and with angels the spirit that enables escape from death's confines. Recognition of this hybrid nature and of the precarious stance between death and life is cause for uneasy but hopeful laughter. Charlotte Spivack explains that "Endowed with a perspective of his own incongruity, man is afforded laughter as a means of reconciling the contrary aspects of his nature."⁴ Thus humor's frequent convergence with death in medieval literature and art should not be surprising, for the terms rationali, mortali, and risus capax interlock in the medieval conception of man.⁵ According to the anonymous author of Diues et Pauper, laughter is God's gift to man, signifying the soul's inherent longing for joy. Earthly mirth is then but a foretaste of the perfect happiness man may receive after death.⁶

As in Christian comedy, so too in Shakespeare's comedies and romances death functions as an instrument of self-knowledge and regeneration. Unlike the Christian emphasis on celestial affairs, however, Shakespeare centers on temporal renewal. Feigned or imaginary deaths, like that of Ferdinand in The Tempest, imminent deaths, like that of Claudio in Measure for Measure and real deaths occurring either off-stage or before the play's action begins, such

as the deaths of Mamillius and Antigonus in A Winter's Tale, provide frequent plot complications whose resolutions depend on the characters' capacity for human understanding. Initially frustrating happiness, death opens the way to remorse, repentance, and compassion. Sympathetic action thus surmounts death and the comic catastrophe ensues. Reinforcing the theme of death's restorative power are burlesque subplots which reduce death to absurdity. Caliban's conspiracy against Prospero's life in The Tempest, the mechanicals' performance of "Pyramus and Thysby" in A Midsummer Night's Dream and Pompey's assistance to the hangman in Measure for Measure farcically mock death's terrors, furthering our sense of relief from death.

While Shakespeare's comedies and romances make explicit death's regenerative powers by providing happy endings, his tragedies merely suggest possibilities for renewal. Risible elements blend with moments of death to imply restorative powers diminished by pride and hatred. Hamlet's encounter with the merry gravemaker who quibbles and sings while unearthing skulls, Cleopatra's visit by the jovial clown who bears the "pretty worm of Nilus," and Macduff's greeting by the equivocating porter who bids him enter Hell-Gate point at once to the unceasing dialectic of death and life and to our potential for future rejuvenation. Momentarily, we realize the intimate relation between death and Hamlet, Ophelia, Cleopatra, and Macbeth, while we simultaneously sense, through the jovial nonchalance of the gravediggers, the clown, and the porter, a cyclical order that extends beyond personal tragedy. The scene first functions as a

memento mori not only for the characters poised on the threshold of death but for the viewer as well. We weigh the finality of death against human vanity, finding ambition to be hollow and hate impotent. Self-knowledge thus extends beyond the confines of the play to the spectator whose potential for renewal remains open-ended. As the antic points a mocking finger at us as well as at the hero or heroine, we sympathize fully with the one who must die. Our identification becomes for a brief moment complete, thus allowing us to transfer our negative impulses to the victim. As the antic then engages us in merry laughter, he helps us to release the doomed scapegoat and encourages us to celebrate the freedom that this death makes possible. We find consolation in life's continuity as reflected in the vivacity of the clowns and sense the infinite possibilities of humility and love.

In working with Shakespeare's plays, I have attempted to understand them as far as possible in their own terms. That is I have tried not merely to impose a single design on the plays but to see what designs and patterns are there and to bring to the readings the materials that seem relevant to the patterns that emerge. I say this knowing too well that my aim can only be partially achieved--that like my fellow mortals, I am limited by my individual prejudices and my ways of perceiving the world. Commenting on Leo Steinberg's criticism of his paintings, Jasper Johns expresses what I believe to be the highest aim of a critic: "I was impressed with Leo Steinberg's comments on my work; it seemed to me that he tried to deal directly with the work and not put his own map of preconceptions

over it. He saw the work as something new, and then tried to change himself in relation to it, which is very hard to do."⁷ What Jasper Johns is describing is the critic's process of self-growth when engaging in the artistic experience. My desire to extend myself through the act of interpretation accounts for my eclectic method which blends historical materials with sociological, structural, and psychological ideas.

When I first began to examine comic-tragic blending in Shakespeare's plays, two things seemed apparent: first, that our response to death was both emotional and intellectual, and second, that the comical countered our terror while enhancing the hopeful message of the skull. Herbert Weisinger's theory of tragedy and John Holloway's use of ritual pattern in treating Shakespeare's tragedies provided me with a context for examining laughable elements in the tragedies. Both Weisinger and Holloway agree that it is our engagement with the protagonist as he or she undergoes a journey towards death that accounts for our sense of the tragic. Holloway explains, "It is rather that we make contact very directly with the experience through which the protagonist passes in the course of the play. The issue is not, what kind of man Hamlet is; but what he does. Or rather, what he both does and undergoes: how one can describe the whole volume of the experience through which he passes, as one who both acts and suffers the actions of others."⁸ For both Weisinger and Holloway, great tragedy awakens in us a paradoxical feeling of suffering and joy as it imitates the ritual of death and resurrection. Weisinger explains that "our response to tragedy is a

response deeply rooted in the past of man, which tragedy has the power to evoke afresh."⁹ The pleasure that we take in suffering is not a perverse desire for another's pain or for our own but comes from our awareness of "a rational order" that extends beyond an individual's death: "The tragic occurs when by the fall of a man of strong character we are made aware of something greater than that man or even man-kind; we seem to have a new and truer vision of the universe. . . . Tragedy occurs when the accepted order of things is fundamentally questioned only to be the more triumphantly reaffirmed."¹⁰

Although neither Weisinger nor Holloway addresses the issue of the comical in Shakespeare's tragedies, Weisinger offers numerous examples of the festivals, maskings, and orgies which in ancient primitive rituals played a part in the society's slaying of the god-king. That the comical elements in Shakespeare's tragedies might serve a similar function, allowing the audience an occasion to complete its identification with the sacrificial victim and then begin to release him or her, seemed plausible. The medieval cycle plays lent support to this theory, for the death of Christ is almost always accompanied by games and farce. In The Play Called Corpus Christi, V. A. Kolve emphasizes the distancing effect of the tortores' games: "The horror of the Passion is controlled by constantly breaking the flow of its action. As the judges, scornors, tormentors, and executioners become totally absorbed in each new and limited game which they take up, so too is our attention diverted in turn: the Cornish making of the nails, and the premature Chester

dicing are notable examples."¹¹ Kolve also recognizes the irony implicit in these games and its regenerative value. While the torturers feel that they control the game, we realize by Christ's composure amid all their noise and laughter that they are unwitting participants in a cosmic game: "The tortores play with Christ, but we must not forget that Christ is playing too--that He is in the game, by His own choice, to serve His larger purposes. And the game must go as God intends."¹²

While Weisinger and Holloway's discussions of ritual pattern and Kolve's remarks on the distancing value of laughter and on laughter's affirmation of cosmic order were helpful in understanding humor's function in allaying our fears, other works contributed to my examination of the emblematic significance of scenes blending humor and death in Shakespeare's plays. Particularly helpful were studies treating death motifs in literature and the visual arts, like Douglas Gray's Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric and Frederick Parkes Weber's Aspects of Death and Correlated Aspects of Life in Art, Epigram and Poetry;¹³ works on the ars moriendi tradition, like Sister Mary Catherine O'Connor's The Art of Dying Well and Nancy Lee Beaty's Ars Moriendi: The Craft of Dying;¹⁴ studies of tomb sculpture, such as Kathleen Cohen's Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol and Erwin Panofsky's Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini;¹⁵ works treating specific motifs, such as James M. Clark's The Dance of Death: In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and Henri Stegemeier's The Dance of Death in Folksong;¹⁶ and historical studies of death, like Philippe

Ariès' The Hour of Our Death: Western Attitudes toward Death and Johan Huizinga's The Waning of the Middle Ages.¹⁷

In Shakespeare's comedies as well as in his tragedies, ritual patterns blend with the didactic lesson of the skull to induce in us a sense of renewal. The interplay of abusive wit and high-spirited mirth that we find in the laughable scenes in the tragedies C. L. Barber recognizes as essential components of Shakespeare's early comedies. Stressing Shakespeare's affinity to Aristophanes, Barber refers to The Origins of Attic Comedy in which F. M. Cornford suggests "that invocation and abuse were the basic gestures of nature worship behind Aristophanes' union of poetry and railing."¹⁸ Through these "two gestures," the early comedies, explains Barber, move us "through release to clarification": "The clarification achieved by the festive comedies is concomitant to the release they dramatize: a heightened awareness of the relation between man and 'nature'--the nature celebrated on holiday."¹⁹ More pointed than Barber in his remarks on the destructive-recreative power of folk humor is Mikhail Bakhtin in his introduction to Rabelais and His World. For Bakhtin the grotesque image that emerges from carnival suggests ambivalence: the image encompasses "simultaneously the two poles of becoming: that which is receding and dying, and that which is being born: they show two bodies in one, the budding and the division of the living cell. . . . Old age is pregnant, death is gestation, all that is limited, narrowly characterized, and completed is thrust into the lower stratum of the body for recasting and a new birth."²⁰ Since the exemplary figure of gaiety in Shakespeare's comedies is the

fool, studies of fools and folly, such as Enid Welsford's The Fool: His Social and Literary History, William Willeford's The Fool and His Scepter, and Richard Levin's "Clown Subplots: Foil, Parody, Magic," proved invaluable to my work, particularly for their observations on the fool's magical qualities, his ability to reacquaint us with our own inner child, and his affinity to both death and life.²¹ Levin writes of the fool's ability to tap the audience's innocence and playfulness. He explains that our response to the clown "goes well beyond mere acquiescence because we positively enjoy these escapades, and this can be explained by our subconscious tendency to identify the clown not only with a child of ours but also with the child in us, which through him is permitted to throw off the repressions of maturity and civilization and to enact some of its milder fantasies."²² Like Levin, Willeford recognizes the fool's affinity with the recreative principle of nature: "The magical force that induces chaos in the presence of the fool often results in a transvaluation of values that could be the beginning of a new order."²³

But in Shakespeare's comedies, the regenerative movement does not spring solely from its relation to festival and folk humor. The grotesque has a didactic as well as a magical significance. While in the early comedies the emotional journey of dissolution and rebirth supercedes death's value as an instrument of self-knowledge, this second function becomes increasingly important as we move to the middle and late comedies. Treatments of the homiletic significance of evil in pre-Shakespearean drama, such as Bernard Spivack's

Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil, David Bevington's From Mankind to Marlow, and Charlotte Spivack's The Comedy of Evil on Shakespeare's Stage and treatments of typological figures such as Philippa Tristram's Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature were valuable to me in treating Shakespeare's tragicomedies as were works studying concepts of self-knowledge and forgiveness, such as Rolf Soellner's Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge and Robert Grams Hunter's Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness.²⁴ Charlotte Spivack's discussion of the relationship of death, evil, and laughter was particularly helpful. The concept of evil as privative being, which is central to her study, explains not only the kinship of evil and death or "non-Being" but also the bond between death and laughter. Spivack explains that our laughter at demonic figures comes from our awareness of their naïveté, "their deluded sense of superiority. The mockery and gibes of evil characters are doubly funny in that they only seem to be based on a comprehension of reality, whereas they are but added reflections of deprived Being, of a limited and distorted rationality."²⁵ Shakespeare's tragicomedies, like the tragedies, investigate the complexities of evil and humanity's moral struggle in accepting mortality, responsibility, and grace. While ambivalence and uncertainty pervade the world of the tragicomedies, the late comedies define and clarify the issues of death, self-knowledge, and restoration. The projection of the conflict onto the pastoral landscape simplifies and objectifies the passage through psychic death to spiritual renewal. Renato Poggioli's "The Oaten Flute"

examines the differences between the bucolic and the georgic modes and the pagan and the Christian conceptions of the garden while Erwin Panofsky's "Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegaic Tradition" was useful for its interpretation of various treatments of death in renaissance pastoral art.²⁶ Describing the evolution of the convention of death in Arcady, Panofsky mentions two contrasting treatments of death in the renaissance pastoral, the gothic and the romantic. In Shakespeare's late comedies, we find that humor serves to reconcile the tension existing between the opposed treatments. As laughter touches the play's romantic conception of death, it works like a lightning rod to forestall our criticism, and as laughter infuses the grotesque, it suggests the victory of life over the grave. Laughter thus affirms both the play's wistful sensitivity to the brevity of time and the idea that spiritual freedom is paradoxically attainable by acknowledging mortal limitations. Kathi Meyer-Baer's Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death, by stressing the relationship between the mortal and the cosmic dances, then offered a context for understanding the interdependence of life and death that is symbolized by the engagement masque and the Calibanian antimasque in The Tempest.

My method assumes that the interplay of events and their significations in the viewer's mind make meaning possible. To broaden the context for interpretation, my work examines funerary and comic motifs in the art and literature of the late middle ages and the renaissance. I devote some time to popular drama, particularly to moral plays, miracle plays, and comic interludes, for here humor

often blends with the lessons of death and salvation. I have, however, given special consideration to visual treatments of death. Illustrations for psalters, books of hours, emblems, and popular songs and poems have been particularly helpful, as have portraits, church murals, and paintings. Motifs that hold special relevance to my study are The Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead, The Vado Mori, The Dance of Death, The Music of the Spheres, and Death in Arcady. Placed against Shakespeare's treatment of humor and death, these traditions have afforded new and valuable insights.

By briefly examining a passage from Richard II and some scenes from I Henry IV, we see how the antic Death plays a regenerative role in the tragedies and how the antic then becomes a transforming power in the comedies. In Richard's famous speech marking his acquiescence to Bullingbrook, the King describes in vivid detail the menacing jester Death:

No matter where--of comfort no man speak:
 Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs,
 Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
 Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
 Let's choose executors and talk of wills;
 And yet not so, for what can we bequeath
 Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
 Our lands, our lives, and all are Bullingbrook's,
 And nothing can we call our own but death,
 And that small model of the barren earth
 Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.
 For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
 And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
 How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,
 Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
 Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping kill'd,
 All murdered--for within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,

To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks,
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
As if this flesh which walls about our life
Were brass impregnable; and humor'd thus,
Comes at the last and with a little pin
Bores thorough his castle wall, and farewell king!
 Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
 With solemn reverence, throw away respect,
 Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty,
 For you have but mistook me all this while,
 I live with bread like you, feel want,
 Taste grief, need friends: subjected thus,
 How can you say to me I am a king?"

(III.ii.144-175, emphasis mine)²⁸

As the speech unfolds, we sense subtle shifts in Richard's attitude and feelings. He moves from intense self-pity to bitterness and finally to resignation and humility. In the early lines, Richard's absorption in death's physicality, in "graves," "worms," and "epitaphs," suggests a morbid, sensual repulsion at the thought of his own death. Still more repugnant for Richard is to know that nothing will be his to bequeath. All belongs to Bullingbrook. Richard's focus then moves from his personal defeat and imminent death to the fate of all kings: "How some have been depos'd, some slain in war, / Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping kill'd / All murdered." At this point, exactly mid-way through the speech Richard's mood begins to change, first to intense bitterness and then to humility. As he describes the grinning antic who makes the king his fool, Richard's words harbor deep resentment. The tone is similar to that found in Hans Holbein's "Dance of Death" in the illustration of the emperor (Fig. 3).²⁹ The monarch in Holbein's woodcut sits on a throne in regal attire deciding the fate of a poor man. The emperor does not feel the bony hands of the skeleton as



Fig. 3. Hans Holbein, "The Emperor" from The Dance of Death (1538)

they seize his crown nor does he realize the bitter irony in the fact that his own state is less than that of the kneeling suppliant. While the irony of Holbein's illustration is apparent only to the viewer, Richard is sharply aware of the irony of the memento mori he creates. As he experiences the true poverty of his estate, however, his anger subsides into calm. Richard now identifies himself not only with all kings, but with all people, "I live with bread like you, feel want, / Taste grief, need friends." Richard's receptiveness and his identification with his subjects is crucial, for Richard, the once profligate and proud King, is to symbolically purge the nation through his death. Richard who in the opening lines of the passage saw himself as worm's meat now associates himself with nourishing, sacramental bread, "I live with bread like you." In this speech, Richard performs his own ritual mockery and dethronement though he will rally his spirits one last time at the instigation of the Bishop of Carlisle. The passage reveals in microcosm the paradoxical ascension of Richard that occurs throughout the play. The paradox that we find here as in so many of Shakespeare's plays is that as Richard humbles himself he becomes for us more regal and inwardly powerful. The words that end the lines of the passage suggest this paradoxical ascension. The significant end words through line 159 are "epitaphs," "earth," "bones," "kings," "war," "deposed," and "kill'd." These words are grimly visual and reflect Richard's psychological and physical descent. At line 160, the end words begin to change. They have none of the graphic physicality of the first list. The words "pomp," "looks," and "conceit" suggest the

vanity of physical superiority while words such as "crown," "life," "blood," "respect," "duty," and "king" (which ends three lines including the final line) remind us that Richard is more than ever England's king. He must bear the burdens of his people's guilt, even as he has hastened their demise. As Richard accepts his place among all men, he gives the fool's cap to his adversaries Death and Bullingbrook and receives a crown that cannot be snatched by mortal men nor pierced by the antic's pin.³⁰

In Richard II the antic Death is described briefly yet vividly as a "grinning," malicious jester who is anything but laughable. When antic Death ceases to be a rhetorical figure and takes on the fullness of a character, a light-hearted, merry wit often becomes his most significant feature. The major exception to this is Lear's fool, who like Richard's antic contributes to the monarch's self-knowledge and to ours yet possesses little joy or playfulness by which he might distance us from the fated King. Unlike Hamlet's gravedigger, Romeo and Juliet's nurse, and Macbeth's porter, Lear's fool is an extension of the protagonist. He, in fact, calls himself at one point "Lear's shadow." Like a shadow, the fool journeys with the King towards isolation, pain, and death. He helps us to sympathize with Lear and points us, as well as Lear, towards a sense of mortality and self-knowledge, but here his function ends. Since he possesses no gaiety or joy, he cannot help us to separate from the King. More typical of the fools of death, however, is Falstaff, Shakespeare's most colorful and laughable fool. In Falstaff merriment mingles with scorn. If Richard gives to Bullingbrook the

fool's cap along with the crown of England, then Falstaff, as surrogate father to Hal, is surely the personified nemesis who flouts the guilt-ridden and aging King by threatening to usurp his heir, and thus his Kingdom and, as Henry believes, his life. I would like to examine closely a scene from I Henry IV, in order to show the function of Shakespeare's merry antics in the comedies. We will find that, as in the passage from Richard II, the fool plays a role in the sacrifice. But more completely than in Richard the antic helps to effect our catharsis.

When Hotspur falls to the ground after meeting the fatal stroke of the Prince of Wales, the dramatic moment is highly serious. The antagonist of the realm, valiant and proud, is dead. Hal honors him for his noble heart, and then upon finishing his eulogy, spies the corpulent body of feigning Falstaff. We sense an antithesis when Hal moves his attention from Hotspur to Falstaff. As Hal has expressed his admiration for Hotspur in eloquent phrases, he appropriately reveals his sadness for Falstaff in humorous double entendre. When Hal leaves, Falstaff springs to life and, after quibbling over the true meaning of the word "counterfeit," shudders to think that Hotspur could also be counterfeiting: "Zounds, I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy though he be dead. How if he should counterfeit and rise? By my faith. I am afraid he would prove the better counterfeit" (V.iv.121-24). Falstaff's suggestion that Hotspur would be feigning death points to the disparate characters of the two men. Only Falstaff, a laughable rascal having no desire for valor, could entertain the notion that Hotspur might pretend to be dead.

For Falstaff, this suggestion fosters an idea: why not claim to have killed Harry Percy and receive honors for saving the kingdom? As soon as Falstaff entertains this notion, he stabs Hotspur and then lifts him onto his back in order to present him to the King, a gesture that brings to a focus the irony of the entire scene. That the ridiculous coward Falstaff should take such liberties with the body of Hotspur strikes the viewer as an absurd outrage.

In Act I, we first notice the striking differences between Hotspur, the man of action and seriousness, and Falstaff, the man of sloth and pleasure. Young Percy is highly conscious of the march of time and has wasted none in accumulating honors. In scene one, Westmoreland praises the exploits of Hotspur who on Holy-rood day had met the brave and "ever-valiant" Scot, Archibald (i.52-54). The King also affirms Hotspur's deeds, telling his lords that on Holmedon's plain Hotspur took as his prize Mardake Earl of Fife as well as the earls of Athol, Murray, Angus, and Menteith (i.70-74). Although King Henry applauds this honorable spoil, he is nonetheless disturbed by Percy's refusal to turn over his prisoners to the realm. Hotspur's defiance of the King underscores not only courage and high spirits but an overwhelming pride. We thus associate Hotspur with important matters of the realm, and we see that his actions are sufficient to trouble the King and delay the royal crusade to the Holy Lands.

As Hotspur is associated with matters of state and with time, Falstaff is associated with matters of the tavern and with sack. In scene two, we look in upon Falstaff and Hal. Falstaff lethargically asks the time: "Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?" (1). Hal's

response to Falstaff's question gives us an excellent portrait of the rogue who is to offset the serious matter of the play by his comic wit and absurd bravado:

Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldest truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping-houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-color'd taffata; I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of day.

(I.ii.2-12)

We see the disparity between gallant fiery Hotspur and this comical and human rogue. While Hotspur has Holmedon to his credit, Falstaff will have Gadshill. The two men inhabit different worlds, and it is only in the scene of Hotspur's death that the two come together. It is perhaps suitable that Hotspur and Falstaff should converge in a scene of death, for Death takes the wise man as readily as the fool. In an illustration accompanying an anonymous ballad of the sixteenth century entitled "The Daunce and Song of Death," we see opposites paired. The king holds the hand of the beggar, the old man the hand of the child, the wise man the hand of the fool, all being led by figures of death (Fig. 4).³¹ As Falstaff hoists Hotspur onto his back, the two opposite characters become violently yoked. The dominating power is now that of the fat, laughable rogue. For a brief moment, roles have become reversed, and we laugh at the exchange of power and at the coward's impertinence, while at the same time we sense in Falstaff's gesture, the triumph of the forces of

The Daunce and Song of Death.



Fig. 4. "The Daunce and Song of Death," illustration accompanying a ballad by John Audeley (1596)

life over death. We find an added jest in Falstaff's gesture when we remember one of the conventional exits of the Vice at the end of a morality play. The mischievous Vice is thrown on the devil's back or ordered to mount the devil and carried away, usually to hell. In Like Will to Like, for example, Nickel Newfangle, when told to ride the devil, exchanges some jolly words on the subject: "Woh, Ball, woh! and I will come by and by. / Now for a pair of spurs I would give a good groat! / To try whether this jade do amble or trot. . . ."³² Hotspur's name reminds us of Nickel, who though lacking spurs possesses the vitality to enjoy the devil's game. Hotspur, however, cannot join in Falstaff's fun. He cannot drive the jade on with hot spurs, but must share in his cowardly scheme to win honor. For Hotspur, who wished to "pluck bright honor from the pale-fac'd moon" (I.iii.201), honor has become indeed a mocking grimace, "a mere scutcheon" (V.i.140). While Falstaff's abuse of Hotspur's corpse reminds us of our own fragile lives and of the senseless waste of ambition and pride, it also offers us an opportunity to celebrate the freedom that Hotspur's death makes possible.

The expulsion of the surrogate prince through death and laughter is comparable to the periodic expulsion of sins in primitive rituals. In Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, Eliade explains that the "annual expulsion of sins, diseases, and demons is basically an attempt to restore--if only momentarily-- mythical and primordial time, 'pure' time, the time of the instant of the Creation."³³ In this destruction of usual time, order, and hierarchy, this momentary return to chaos, "we witness, one might say

a 'deluge' that annihilates all humanity in order to prepare the way for a new and regenerated human species."³⁴ With the victory of Falstaff over Hotspur, we experience the destruction of ordinary time and of hierarchy. "Cups of sack," "capons," "tongues of bawds," and "leaping houses" reign supreme over "hours," "minutes," "clocks," and "dials." As we experience this triumph of laughter over death and time, we return for an instant to chaos where the sins of the crown are washed clean. In this moment the rebel threat to England dissolves. We realize the tragedy of Hotspur's death, the loss of youth and vitality, yet we are simultaneously consoled by the adversary's defeat, for it offers new hope for England.

Role playing serves an important function in the play, for it allows Hotspur to become a substitute sacrifice. As his death spares Henry and Hal, it preserves the kingdom's integrity, bringing the play to a comic rather than a tragic close. When Falstaff uses the word "counterfeit" to describe Hotspur and himself, we remember the many counterfeit kings marching in battle as decoys. These associations suggest that Falstaff, Hotspur, and the King have been locked in an elaborate game of deception. Throughout the play Hotspur has manifested all of the valiant qualities that we associate with a prince. He has taken the place in honor left vacant by Hal, who has himself been playing a fool in the fashion of the late King Richard and the "carnival king" Falstaff. In Act I, King Henry expresses his grief as he reflects on the role reversals of the two Harrys, "O that it could be prov'd / That some night-tripping fairy had exchang'd / In cradle-clothes our children where they lay / And

call'd mine Percy, his Plantagenet! Then would I have his Harry and he mine" (i.86-90). The father/son identification between the King and Hotspur and between Richard and Hal grows stronger when in Act III, the King scolds his son: "For all the world / As thou art to this hour was Richard then / When I from France set foot at Ravenspurgh, / And even as I was then is Percy now" (ii.33-36).

Not only have Hal and Hotspur been counterfeiting, King Henry too has been role playing. Richard's crown has proven an uncomfortable fit for Henry. He has pretended to be the true King though in his heart he feels himself a usurper. William Willeford explains that "when any king fails his office, he becomes, at least for the moments of that failure, one of the 'counterfeit kings' . . . ; like an unconvincing actor he may fall to the mercy of the clown, who, having no fixed place in the action, is free to occupy the center intended for the king but abandoned by him."³⁵ In just this way, Henry allows Falstaff to move towards the center of the play, gathering strength from the King's weakness. We sense Henry's weakness, a consequence of his guilt, in the opening line when he speaks of his crusade to the Holy Lands, "So shaken as we are, so wan with care . . . " (I.i.1). As the play moves us through laughter and tears, it works to uncover the authentic King. At the battle of Shrewsbury, Douglas looks for the King amid all the pretenders, and we hope that his search will uncover a new and vital monarch. As is so often true in Shakespeare's plays, particularly in the late comedies, the aging king's power is dependent on his relationship with his children. It is thus significant that Douglas'

discovery of the King is accompanied by Hal's defense of his father, a demonstration of the Prince's love and courage. The transfer of power from King Richard and Falstaff to King Henry and from Percy to the Prince of Wales is not complete until Hal slays Hotspur. At this moment, the Prince gives a final example of his true nature and in receiving honor from the defeat of Hotspur empowers as well his father and the realm. The guilt of the King's insurrection is cleansed by the blood of the new insurgent. When Hal slays Hotspur, Percy's dying words indicate the transfer of honor from his head to Hal's, "I better brook the loss of brittle life / Than those proud titles thou hast won of me" (V.iv.78-79). And Hotspur dies, leaving Hal to finish the thought which was on his lips, "And food for--" with these words, "For worms, brave Percy" (V.iv.86-87).

Hotspur, who has dominated the play from the beginning, is deposed, and from valiant rebel attacks, England is safe. Falstaff's degradation of the corpse celebrates the surrogate Prince's dissolution. At the moment that Hotspur is degraded, however, we realize that a potential enemy of the realm is at large, and that he is fatter and prouder than ever. The rogue Falstaff still lives. The life force that we view in Falstaff makes us laugh heartily, yet we may be slightly uneasy for his sloth and impudence represent potential threats to the newly cemented realm. Just as the irrational, procreative powers offer hope for new life, they carry within them the seeds of destruction. It is this aspect of Falstaff's "lust for living" that concern us. Falstaff has in his own humorous fashion played his hand for power. He would bring the

Prince under his influence and crown himself the king of luxury, exempt from all of the penalties of law. Hotspur and Falstaff, however, differ from Hal in their counterfeiting, for they deceive not only others but also themselves. Hal, however, is always conscious of his real identity. He promised his father that at the right moment he would make himself known, "And in the closing of some glorious day / Be bold to tell you that I am your son" (III.ii.133-34). This promise Harry has honored. Now as we watch Falstaff's boasting of his prize, we may laugh and enjoy the rogue's arrogant posturing, for we remember another promise made by Hal, that at some future time he could and would "banish fat Jack" (II.iv.480-81). One sign of the sovereign's power, according to William Willeford, is that he allows the fool license, knowing that he can easily tighten the reins at will. Willeford explains, "In tolerating the [fool's jokes] the king partly affirms the royal power that the fool pretends to deny. Thus the office of the jester fulfills some of the same functions as the ritualized rebellion in which political subjects express actual and possible resentments against authority. The fact that the rebellion is allowed and even encouraged implies that the social institutions and the persons in power are strong enough to tolerate it; thus it serves the interests of authority and of social cohesion."³⁶ Falstaff's antics at this point reflect the Prince's and the King's power. With the King and the Prince in their rightful places, there is no room for Falstaff at the realm's head. We thus may celebrate the return of the prodigal

Prince and the discovery of the "true King" as we laugh with Hal at the antics of the fool.

Not only are the King and the Prince returned to their rightful places, we too, by sharing in Falstaff's foolery, discover the child within ourselves and thus enjoy a truer sense of ourselves. We are not constricted now by fear, by the defiance of Hotspur and the influence of Falstaff, but may safely and freely play within the boundaries of the new order. As in so many of Shakespeare's plays, our laughter at and with the fool involves self-extension. In the momentary return to chaos and innocence, we give as well as accept grace. We forgive the rebel Hotspur just as we forgive the rebel Bullingbrook. And with this humility and forgiveness, we discover a spontaneous power and a more vital self. Like King Henry and the Prince, we cease being less than our best and discard the robes of the counterfeit.

In order to understand the development of Shakespeare's use of laughter and death throughout the canon, I have divided my paper by genres. My first section will look at the treatment of death in the festive comedies. Much Ado About Nothing will show Shakespeare's early use of a symbolic death to point the way to happiness and the integral part of laughter in completing this journey. My second section focuses on the tragicomedies and will demonstrate the growing homiletic emphasis in Shakespeare's treatment of death and humor. All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure will illustrate the developing complexity of the issues of sacrifice and forgiveness. Just as the struggle to accept one's mortality becomes more

difficult, so too the comical elements grow darker. Laughable characters, however, suggest not only the pervasiveness of evil but also its ultimate impotence when countered with faith and love. My third section centers on the tragedies. I will use Hamlet and Antony and Cleopatra to investigate the comic-tragic moment in terms of tragic structure. We will find that the issues of sacrifice and self-knowledge, that are important for each major character to assimilate in the tragicomedies, are in the tragedies crucial only for the protagonist. Because of this focus and the rarity of humor, the relationship between the audience and the protagonist is greatly intensified. The audience's hope, like the kingdom's, rests on the hero or the heroine's death. The laughter at moments of death offers us the distance needed to separate from the hero or heroine, to assimilate the meaning of our own mortality, and to anticipate and celebrate the triumph of order over chaos--of life over death. My final section which treats the late comedies, will center on laughter and death as they enter the world of the pastoral romance. The deep sense of loss that accompanies our feelings of hope in the tragedies, is present also in the late romances. Our pain comes not from the protagonist's death, however, but from the loneliness that accompanies prolonged estrangement of friends and family. Thus, while in the tragedies, we experience the bitterness of lives prematurely ended, in the romances we feel sadness for lives that, although long, have been only partially lived. Our pain then is melancholy. It springs from regret and longing, from the knowledge that time cannot be reclaimed, rather than from a fear of imminent

and unnatural death. But as in Shakespeare's earlier plays, so too in the late comedies, laughter mitigates the pain and points to the hope that resides in our openness to love. The reconciliation of parents and children symbolizes a willingness to extend and accept grace. As they embrace their newly found child, the parents' triumph is, like ours, a momentary return to innocence, a recovery and an affirmation of the sacred child within ourselves.

Notes

¹George Wither, A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne: Quickened with Metricall Illustrations . . . (London: Printed by A. M. for Robert Allot, 1625), Bk. I, Illust. i. As numerous critics have discerned, the skeletons and death's heads were often expressions of the terrors of the Black Death. In an illustration by Jean Colombe for the Tres Riches Heures of the Duc de Berry (c. 1470), which treats the fourth horseman of the apocalypse, a phalanx of corpses marches against a meager troop of living men. The smiles on the skeleton's faces, their bold demeanor, and the fearful expressions of the living tell both the story of recent history as well as of a prophetic apocalypse. Illustration reproduced in Barbara W. Tuchman, A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), Illust. 19.

²Wither, Bk. I, Illust. xxi.

³Certain sermons of homilies, appointed to be read in churches; in the time of Queen Elizabeth . . . (London: Printed for George Wells, 1687).

⁴Charlotte Spivack, The Comedy of Evil on Shakespeare's Stage (London: Associated Univ. Presses, Inc., 1978), p. 25.

⁵Spivack, p. 25.

⁶V. A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 133-134. Diues et Pauper asserts that mirth is among the major purposes of medieval religious drama. The anonymous author "holds (on scriptural authority) that to play to God and for God is to please Him, that human joy and such humility as chooses to express joy in play and game are acceptable to heaven."

⁷Margaret Moorman, "Leo Steinberg and the Sexuality of Christ," Artnews 3 (March, 1985), 80.

⁸John Holloway, The Story of the Night, Studies in Shakespeare's Major Tragedies (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1963), p. 22.

⁹Herbert Weisinger, Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1953), p. 228.

¹⁰Weisinger, p. 226.

¹¹Kolve, p. 200.

¹²Kolve, p. 200. Kolve uses the Towneley Crucifixion to show the irony developed through play. The primus tortore first introduces the metaphor of tournament when defining the type of game figure to substitute for the real Jesus:

In fayth, syr, sen ye callyd you a kyng
you must prufe a worthy thyng
That falles vnto the were;
ye must lust in tornamente.

(p. 191)

The other tortores then join in the game, suggesting that Jesus mount his palfrey, the Cross. The image that the tortores create is that of Christ's harrowing of hell. It is an image of His victory rather than His defeat: "By the time of the cycles, the dying and the victory were conceived separately: victory was postponed until Christ harrowed hell, and a traditional statement of His triumph there was as a knightly combat in which he jousts with Satan for man's soul. The Towneley dramatist has simply--and brilliantly--displaced that metaphor into the Crucifixion itself, to create a powerful dramatic irony: he makes the tortores dress Christ, in their game figure, for just such an encounter" (p. 192).

¹³Douglas Gray, Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972). Frederick Parkes Weber, Aspects of Death and Correlated Aspects of Life in Art, Epigram, and Poetry: Contributions towards an Anthology and an Iconography of the Subject, 4th ed. (College Park, Maryland: McGrath Publishing Co., 1971). Also, see Marjorie Garber's "Remember Me": Memento Mori Figures in Shakespeare's Plays, Renaissance Drama, New Series, XII, ed. Alan C. Dessen (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1981); Mother Mary Christopher Pecheux's Aspects of the Treatment of Death in Middle English Poetry (Washington: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1951); and Theodore Spencer's Death and Elizabethan Drama (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936). Also see Joan Evans' English Art 1307-1461, V (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949); Walter Oakeshott's

The Sequences of Medieval Art: Illustrated Chiefly from Illuminated MSS, 650-1450 (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1950); E. W. Tristram's English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955); J. Henry Middleton's Illuminated Manuscripts in Classical and Mediaeval Times: Their Art and Their Technique (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1892), Medieval Miniatures from Department of Manuscripts, the Royal Library of Belgium (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1965). J. A. Herbert's Illuminated Manuscripts, originally published in London, 1911 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1958), British Museum: Reproductions from Illuminated Manuscripts, No. 1, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Longmans and Co. and Oxford Univ. Press, 1923).

¹⁴Sister Mary Catherine O'Connor, The Art of Dying Well: The Development of the Ars Moriendi (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1942). Nancy Lee Beaty, The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970).

¹⁵Kathleen Cohen, Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Trasi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973). Cohen discusses the corpse as a symbol of resurrection: "Before the appearance of transi figures, the image of the corpse as a symbol of resurrection was presented in four separate associations: as part of the language of alchemical symbolism; to represent the grave of Adam; to illustrate various verses from the Book of Job; and in association with the resurrection of Christ" (p. 96). "Alchemical writers," explains Cohen, "stressed the fact that the death and decomposition of the body (the alchemical ingredients) was a necessary prelude to resurrection. The body must "die, rot by putrefaction, and then it will regenerate in glory" (p. 98). Erwin Panofsky, Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Vernini, ed. H. W. Janson (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1964).

¹⁶James M. Clark, The Dance of Death: In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Glasgow: Jackson, Son and Company, 1950). Henri Stegemeier, The Dance of Death in Folksong with an Introduction on the Dance of Death (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Libraries, 1939).

¹⁷Philippe Ariès, Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974). Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1924).

¹⁸C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959), p. 7.

¹⁹Barber, p. 8.

²⁰Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 52-53.

²¹Enid Welsford, The Fool: His Social and Literary History (London: Faber and Faber, 1968). William Willeford, The Fool and His Scepter: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1969). Richard Levin, The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971).

²²Levin, p. 139.

²³Willeford, p. 111.

²⁴Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1958). David Bevington, From Mankind to Marlow: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962). Charlotte Spivack. Philippa Tristram, Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1976). Rolf Soellner, Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1972). Robert Grams Hunter, Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965).

²⁵Charlotte Spivack, p. 28.

²⁶Renato Poggioli, "The Oaten Flute," Harvard Library Bulletin (1957). Erwin Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegaic Tradition," Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1955).

²⁷Kathi Meyer-Baer, Music and the Spheres and the Dance of Death: Studies in Musical Iconology (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970).

²⁸William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of King Richard the Second in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974). All future citations and quotations of Shakespeare's plays come from this edition.

²⁹Hans Holbein, Dance of Death and Bible Woodcut, originally published in 1538 (New York: Sylvan Press, 1947), Illust. VII, p. 7.

³⁰In I Henry VI (IV.vii.18-22), antic Death is also connected to the idea of regeneration. Old Talbot, holding the body of his son, ridicules Death for its false hold on his child: "Thou antic Death, which laugh'st us here to scorne, / Anon from thy insulting tyranny, / Coupled in bonds of perpetuity, / Two Talbots, winged through the lither sky, / In thy despite shall scape mortality."

³¹"The Daunce and Song of Death," (sixteenth century broadsheet; British Museum, Huth 50), reproduced in Gray's Themes and Images, p. 215. The illustration accompanies John Audeley's ballad (Ann Arbor: Univ. Microfilms, N.D.).

³²Like Will to Like in A Select Collection of Old English Plays, W. Carew Hazlitt, ed. (London: Reeves and Turner, 1874), p. 356.

³³Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 54.

³⁴Eliade, p. 57.

³⁵Willeford, p. 154.

³⁶Willeford, p. 155.

CHAPTER II
RE-CREATIVE DESTRUCTION:
COMIC-TRAGIC FUSION IN THE EARLY COMEDIES

In each of us resides a small child who is frightened to venture far from its parents' side and meet the challenges of a complex and changing world. Shakespeare's festive comedies allow our inner child to work through this fear, and the result of our experience is a sense of renewed power and autonomy. These early plays portray the breaking of restraints, which are sometimes explicitly parental, the pain and grief of separation, and the establishment of new bonds. Feelings of abandonment that accompany separation may be manifested by a mock death such as Hero's in Much Ado About Nothing, by a period of mourning such as Olivia's in Twelfth Night, or by a death threat such as the ultimatum issued by Theseus in A Midsummer Night's Dream.¹ Through these encounters with death, we see the kernel of what will become a dominant issue in Shakespeare's later plays, the idea that spiritual strength and love come by first accepting our kinship with death. While symbolic deaths enter the early comedies, they receive far less development than in the tragicomedies and the late romances where we are asked to seriously and prolongedly contemplate the lesson of the grave. Instead, devices like disguise, exile, magic, and darkness are used to intimate vulnerability, since these can easily be turned into play. As we watch the action, we

gain a sense of freedom both from our identification with the characters who surmount their fears of annihilation and from the magical release of laughter. Mirth and gaiety prevent us from succumbing to the solipsistic abyss, the frustration and despair, that beckons as the hero's or heroine's journey reaches its nadir. Humor assures us that the world beyond the parental fold is benevolent and encourages us to see its complexities as a perpetual source of fascination and joy. Feste's playful ridicule of Olivia suggests the happiness that awaits when we break the restrictive bonds of our past:

Clo. Good madonna, why mourn'st thou?
 Oli. Good fool, for my brother's death.
 Clo. I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
 Oli. I know his soul is in heaven, fool.
 Clo. The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's
 soul, being in heaven. Take away the fool,
 gentlemen.
 Oli. What think you of this fool, Malvolio? doth he not
 mend?

(I.v.66-77)

The fool does indeed mend. He becomes not merely the better fool, but a physician of mirth. Through his wit he undermines the logical basis of Olivia's grief, making his mistress the fool and her excessive grief mere folly. As Olivia's pleasure in Feste's railery contrasts Malvolio's sardonic response, "Yes, and shall do till the pangs of death shake him" (I.v.78), it indicates her increasing readiness to release her brother to death and participate in the springtime rites of love. Like Olivia, many of the protagonists in Shakespeare's festive comedies must experience the pain of lost

childhood before they can commit themselves to new relationships. The gaiety that accompanies the vows of betrothal at the ends of the plays celebrates the passage through death to a new stage of life.

Humor and death combine in two ways in Shakespeare's comedies. They occasionally converge in a single moment, such as in Midsummer when the mechanicals unknowingly transform the tragedy of Pyramus and Thisby into farce. When tragic suffering collides with carefree, bumptious mechanicals, the moment erupts into a saturnalian expulsion of death. Pyramus-Bottom holds up for ridicule not only the tragic genre but also death itself when he imitates the eloquence of dying stage lovers:

Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.
 Now am I dead,
 Now am I fled;
 My soul is in the sky
Tongue, lose thy light,
Moon, take thy flight,
 Now die, die, die, die, die.

(V.i.300-06, emphasis mine)

As Bottom breathes again and again his final word, we wonder if the fool will ever relinquish his ghost (and his hero's role) as the script demands. Theseus too senses the fool's unquenchable spirit when he remarks; "With the help of a surgeon, he might yet recover and yet prove an ass" (310-11). We recall that in the folk-plays the doctor, while indulging in much horseplay, frequently revives the slaughtered protagonist. Bottom's misplacement of "Tongue" and "Moon" suggests the inversions of this primitive drama, thus reinforcing the connection between Bottom and the folk-play's comic

victim.² Like the St. Georges, the Turkish Knights, and the fools of folk drama, Bottom will not long remain dead. Hearing Demetrius remark that Wall must help Moonshine and Lion bury the dead, the literal-minded fool starts up to explain, "No I assure you, the wall is down that parted their fathers." The tragedy's moral and the destiny of Wall are more important to the fool than sustaining the dramatic illusion (ephemeral as it is).

Bottom's resurrection suggests his recovery in an earlier scene, when he awakens from his "dream" of Fairyland, itself a kind of beautiful death or land of Cockaigne. The drowsiness of Bottom as he lies in Titania's arms and the readiness of Peaseblossom, Mounsieur Cobweb, and Mounsieur Mustardseed to serve Bottom's every desire suggests intoxicating, plentiful Lubberland. Here too we find an analogue in the folk-play and further associations of resurrection. E. K. Chambers explains that although they may overflow into other parts of the folk-play, both rustic paradox and Lubberland seem to have their main home in the "Cure."³ Like the victim's response in a Cornish folk-play when awakening from death, "Aloft, aloft, where have I been, and oh! what strange and foreign lands I've seen," Bottom awakens from his "dream" in dismay and wonder.⁴ Bottom's metamorphosis is so marvelous and illusive that it defies comprehension: "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive nor his heart report what my dream was" (IV.i.211-14). Here again verbal inversion suggests the fool's regenerative power. Bottom's corruption of language mirrors his illogical or prelogical nature.

Bottom is, after all, the only adult mortal during the course of the play to be held in the arms of Titania. The fairy queen's name implies an elemental, unorganized energy. Bottom's affinity to this primordial chaos enables him to dissolve the logical structures that separate life and death as easily as he corrupts the structures of language. To possess Bottom's regenerative power, we must tap his childlike innocence and his simple faith in the goodness of life. We must risk our dignity, wear for the moment the ears of an ass. When we give ourselves over to the rollicking mirth of the mechanical's tragedy, we do just that. For as Bottom struts upon the stage with more enthusiasm than talent and more zeal than understanding, he holds the fool's mirror up to us. He provides a merry satire on all aesthetes and literary know-alls. When we laugh at the mechanical's interpretation of the classics, we must also laugh at our own presumptions to sensitivity and insight. As Bottom rises phoenixlike from the ashes of death, ready to dance the Bergomask, he momentarily banishes all of our apprehensions and doubts. We vicariously enjoy his triumph over death as we enjoy Falstaff's comical resurrection in I Henry IV (V.iv.111-29). The mechanicals prepare the way for the entrance of Oberon and his cortege when they reduce death to absurdity. It is the fairies' job to sustain the fool's magic, to protect the palace throughout the night. As Puck speaks, however, we once more become aware of dangers beyond the palace gates. The lion that Puck describes is not reassuring Snug but a hungry, roaring lion and the moon is not gentle Starveling, but one enticing rapacious wolves to howl. The palace of Theseus seems an island of tranquility

couched in a danger world. The mechanicals' travesty, however, has helped to pierce not only the theatrical illusion of Pyramus and Thisby, but also that of A Midsummer Night's Dream. We realize that the play, like Theseus' palace, is protected by playful nonsense and fairy dust. Although we know that we are soon to be hurled into less hospitable surroundings, we will leave the play with courage and faith, for like Bottom, we have had "a most rare vision." We are emerging from our own bottomless dream, where laughter can dissolve death into a harmless dew. And our experience will linger in our memories, lending to our lives a special grace.

While death may fuse with humor and merriment in a single moment, as in the mechanicals' tragedy, these elements more often combine sequentially, as links combine on a chain. As scenes move before us in rapid succession, we connect and blend disparate tones and ideas. The effect of this horizontal melding is not an explosive celebration of life's victory over death but rather a gradual adjustment of our perspective. The threat of death or a mock death, because it is initially dramatized without humor, seems momentarily ominous. Our fears are soon diminished, however, when carefree characters appear. Linear blending thus enables us to consider seriously the destructive implications of hate and pride, while simultaneously sensing the presence of a benevolent providence. An example of sequential blending occurs in A Midsummer Night's Dream when, after the desperate escape of Hermia and Lysander from Athens, the obtuse tradesmen make their own plans to leave the city. The opening scene of the play with its focus on death suggests the

bitter, painful isolation that leads to maturity. No sooner does Theseus send Philostrate to "Stir up the Athenian Youth to merriments" (I.i.12) than Egeus storms into the palace demanding that his daughter marry the man of his own choosing or else be sentenced to death. We wonder why Egeus is so adamant in his demand, for Demetrius and Lysander are clearly equal in rank, fortune, and birth. Demetrius in fact has committed one offense that might sway a reasonable father to favor Lysander. After pursuing Nedar's daughter Helena and winning her love, Demetrius has cast her aside. Clearly Egeus' intransigence and anger do not spring from wisdom. Egeus is outraged because Hermia has chosen for herself the man she will love. Egeus fears his daughter's autonomy, for it seems to indicate his own isolation and loss of control. Thus death and the nunnery are metaphors not only for Hermia's painful struggle for freedom, but also for Egeus' fear of separation and impotence. As we enter the hempen world of the yokels, however, and overhear their plans to entertain royalty, we gain distance from the tensions of Athens. We sense that these are just the fellows who can "Turn melancholy forth to funerals" (I.i.14). When Bottom rants in the vein of the mighty tyrant Hercules, "the raging rocks / And shivering shocks / Shall break the locks / Of prison gates . . . " (I.ii.31-35), we recall the ravings of another tyrant, old Egeus. Bottom's childish theatrics suggest the child within Egeus. Like the lion's suit that allows us to see Snug's face, Bottom's comical interpretation of Hercules lets us see the little boy behind Egeus' intimidating aspect: "Look closely and you will see, leaning in the corner of the throne, a

little boy in a playsuit, his crown so big it's slipped down over his eyes, his hand clutching a pinwheel, his high voice piping, 'Remember who's the big man around here.'"⁵ When we recognize this bullying, red-faced child, Egeus' threats lose much of their force. His outburst seems now hardly more terrifying than the tantrum of a frightened, manipulative boy. Shakespeare, like Bottom, would not have us frightened by death but would "roar you as gently as any sucking dove" (I.ii.82-83). As the clowns express their concern for dramatic problems, the proper tone for the lion's roar and the most suitable color for Pyramus' beard, we remember that the play we are watching is itself a fiction, and we sense that Hermia and Lysander are, like Pyramus and Thisby, objects of a merry imagination. Thus linear blending, as this example demonstrates, reduces tragic expectancy, while allowing us to sense the pain involved in spiritual growth.

Although humor and death seem antithetical, they are in one way closely allied, for both involve the dissolution of personal identity. In As You Like It, Jaques describes death as it prematurely usurps the body and mind of the aged: "Last scene of all, / That ends this strange eventual history, is second childishness, and mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything" (II.vii.163-66). As Harry Morris notes in his article "As You Like It: Et in Arcadia Ego," Jaques is describing a death's head: "Lack of teeth, of taste, of eyes of everything . . . presents the charnel-house skull."⁶ Similar to Claudio in the later and darker comedy Measure for Measure, Jaques expresses a fear

not only of physical decay, but also of the loss of power and the privation of discrete personality.⁷ Like death, humor entails a similar threat to identity, since it dissolves accepted structures. Devices such as wordplay, chop-logic, disguise, and situational incongruity obscure the boundaries of order, plunging us momentarily into a meaningless world filled with delight as well as with fear. Laughter perhaps springs from the exhilaration of release from constricting structures which indeterminacy affords. By sensing the temporariness of psychic collapse, we enjoy the interval of escape from restraint. If, however, we feel that our distraction is permanent, that we like Humpty Dumpty cannot be recomposed, then anxiety displaces pleasure. For then we sense the threat of insanity and death. C. L. Barber describes this difference in social terms when he distinguishes between festival, the temporary overthrow of everyday order, and anarchy, a complete and lasting collapse of hierarchy.⁸ We may thus relish the temporary topsyturvydom of carnival as we enjoy laughter. Yet we fear the unlimited disruption of anarchy, for it mirrors too clearly our own insanity and death. Just as festival supports order by allowing a reprieve from daily frustrations, humor too contributes to order. For sensing our lapse into meaninglessness, we attempt to dispel confusion, to naturalize the illogical and to modify antiquated patterns to accommodate the new. A resurgence of power accompanies resystematization, for the restored structures are broader and perhaps more flexible than before. We find an example of humor's destructive/recreative power in Touchstone's mimicry of Jaques in As You Like It. Believing

himself an intelligent, worldly man, Jaques is suddenly confronted with his image in the broodings of the fool. Jaques explains to Duke Senior and the band of merry outlaws that while walking in the forest, he met a fool who railed on Lady Fortune and lamented the destructiveness of time:

"It is ten a' clock.
Thus we may see," quoth he, "how the world wags.
"Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,
And after one hour more 'twill be eleven
And so from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
And then from hour to hour, we rot and rot;
And thereby hangs a tale."

(II.vii.22-28)

Seeing his own reflection in the contemplative fool, Jaques, properly humbled, laughs like chanticler. The fool dissolves Jaques' preconceived idea of himself, freeing the malcontent at least temporarily from his own grave spirit. In just this way, humor questions our certainties and challenges us to look at ourselves and at our world from a new stance. Allowing ourselves to enjoy this comic perspective, we may gain greater insight and humility, and if we are not sworn malcontents like Jaques, the lesson of laughter may have lasting effects. Henry Morris suggests that Touchstone's words, "Ay, now am I in Arden" (II.iv.16), echo the translated words of the death's head in the Et in Arcadia tradition, "Ay, now am I in Arcadia." Morris tells us that Touchstone's introduction of the memento mori makes him the appropriate "agent of time, and he emerges as the contradiction to Orlando's claim that 'There's no clock in the forest'."⁹ While Morris associates Touchstone with death, he does

not acknowledge the transvaluation of the memento mori when it is mirrored in the image of the fool. The fool's job is to radically alter perspectives and to overturn hierarchy. Like Feste's mockery of Olivia's grief, Touchstone's imitation of the grim reaper turns traditional values topsyturvy. The fool makes not only Jaques, Orlando, and the audience his fools but also the potent monarch Death. Thus as Touchstone holds his looking-glass before us, he issues not a chilling threat but rather a message of joy. Through laughter he "clarifies" our place in the cycle of nature; he affirms the myth of eternal return.

Like the fool, death may also hold a mirror before us and challenge us to see our own image. Although the intrusion of death may threaten love and life in Shakespeare's early comedies, it paradoxically provides a means of attaining self-knowledge and happiness. The conversion of Oliver in the forest of Arden after being rescued from the snake and the lioness suggests death's power to transform us in fundamental ways. Writers such as John Lydgate and John Davies tell us to view in the mirror of death a true likeness, sin and mortality.¹⁰ For only by being aware of our powerlessness are we made truly humble and receptive to grace. Just as humor depends on a process of decentering, Shakespeare's comic vision likewise assimilates death and renders it powerless. Time and death are not illogically suspended through imaginative wish-fulfillment, but are absorbed into the play's central consciousness. In Shakespeare's early comedies, just as in his later comedies and tragedies, the characters' awareness of death bears upon

their actions. This sensitivity to death may initiate two opposing but interconnected responses on their parts: repulsion at the thought of physical or psychic dissolution (like Claudio in Much Ado, Jaques in As You Like It, and Malvolio in Twelfth Night) and a desire to challenge this ultimate force of destruction (like Hermia and Lysander in Midsummer and Egeon in The Comedy of Errors). While a character may fear annihilation, a contrary impulse may also draw him or her towards death, suggesting that power paradoxically lies in the mystery of one's own mortality. Although these conflicting feelings may intermingle, one eventually dominates, thereby determining the course of dramatic events. A character's inordinate fear of death may result in his attempt to detach himself from time and commitment. By rejecting maturity, the obligations of adulthood or of old age, that character is denying his affinity with death. He is foolishly acting as though by his own means, he could live forever. This attempt to escape time's destruction was known to the renaissance Christian as the pride of life, the sin that according to some accounts first drove Adam and Eve from paradise, thus dooming humanity to a mutable world. Entrapped by mortality, Adam's heirs obtain freedom, not by dismissing death from thought, but by placing it in continual remembrance. A keen awareness of mortality enables a character to attain the humility and faith necessary to vanquish his own fear. The self's integrity thus depends on a willed acceptance of time's demands. A person defers death by self-extension, that is by acknowledging his or her own frailty and placing faith in what lies beyond personal control. While a person's self-extension in the

Christian comedy of redemption means giving himself or herself to Christ, in Shakespeare's comedies, it becomes loving one's spouse, children, and friends.

Two patterns in Shakespeare's comic plays demonstrate this psychic battle between love and death. Fearing the end of love more than death, some characters challenge death for the sake of love while other characters, fearing annihilation, fight to remain stable at the expense of love. The pattern used distinguishes to a large degree the tone of the play. The first is extensively used in the early festive comedies just as the second becomes a dominant pattern in the darker tragicomedies and in the late romances. In the early comedies, the young protagonists are often willing to challenge the bonds that portend spiritual death. Hermia and Lysander in Midsummer, Celia, Rosalind, and Orlando in As You Like It, Viola in Twelfth Night, and Egeon in The Comedy of Errors defer authority and courageously face the unknown. Those who resist mutability in the early comedies are usually minor characters, like Malvolio, Don John, Jaques, and Oliver de Boys. Although these men represent all that is antithetical to comedy, their influence, with the exception of Don John's, is highly limited. While in this first pattern, the main characters risk physical or psychic death to find or to protect the loved one, in the second, someone else must demonstrate the value of sacrifice. Although the second paradigm is only rarely present in the early comedies, it does occur along with the first pattern in Much Ado. The Hero-Claudio plot follows the pattern common to the tragicomedies. Like Bertram and Angelo, Claudio must be shown by

another's sacrifice the way to humility and love. Countering this movement is the Beatrice-Benedick plot which follows the pattern typical of the festive plays. Like Olivia's excessive grief in Twelfth Night, Beatrice and Benedick's war games suggest their initial defensive stance in matters of love. Yet even as they scoff at marriage, their playful scrimmages indicate their developing willingness to submit themselves to the uncertainty of love. Beatrice's merry attack of Benedick at the masquerade and Benedick's challenge to Claudio at Beatrice's request demonstrate their readiness to risk dissolution. Since Beatrice and Benedick are more engaging characters than Claudio and Hero and since their wit and gaiety are more compelling than is the darker strand of action, the play seems more closely related to the festive comedies than to the tragicomedies. But as the play reveals the dire consequences of pride and the importance of sacrifice, it anticipates All's Well and Measure for Measure in which the themes of sacrifice, contrition, and forgiveness gain complexity and the late romances in which these issues achieve final definition and clarity.

Notes

¹As in the festive comedies, so too in personal growth, one's fear of dissolution may find expression in symbols. Margaret P. Korb writes of her patients need to confront the "survival-related fear" that accompanies one's desire to change perceptions and behavioral patterns acquired in childhood: "For some clients, transcendence necessitates a confrontation with the fear as a personal force. Some clients confront a symbol of fear, such as a deep dark cavern, emptiness behind a closed door or a whirling chaos in the trunk of the body." "Therapeutic Steps and Processes in Maturation: A Gestalt Approach," The Gestalt Journal, 8 (1984), 53-54.

²We find verbal inversion similar to Bottom's in the speech of Beelzebub in The Weston-Sub-Edge Play: "She asked if I could eat a cup of her cider and drink a hard crust of her bread and cheese." This play is found in E. K. Chambers' The English Folk-Play (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), pp. 42-48.

³Chambers, p. 50.

⁴In The Mylor Play, when the doctor applies medicine to the wounds of the Turkish Knight, the knight awakens exclaiming:

What places is are!
 What seems appare!
 Whare ever I torn mine eye,
 'Tis all around
 In chantin ground
 And soft delusions rise:
 Flowry mountins,
 Mossy fountins
 What will verietie Surprize

 Tis on the alow walks we walks,
 An hundred ecos round us stock:
 From hils to hils the voices tost,
 Rocks rebounding,
 Ecos resounding,
 Now one single words was lost.

Like Bottom, The Turkish Knight has experienced and is perhaps still experiencing a marvelous, idyllic vision. The Mylor Play is found in Chamber's The English Folk-Play. The Turkish Knight's cure occurs on pages 74-76.

⁵Howard M. Halpern, Cutting Loose: An Adult Guide to Coming to Terms with Your Parents (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 73. The application of Halpern's words to Shakespeare is my own. Halpern explains that in order to separate from a domineering father a person must begin to see the child within the parent. The comic perspective helps the patient to break through his illusions about his parent's omnipotence and see the parent's insecurities.

⁶Harry Morris, "As You Like It: Et in Arcadia Ego," Shakespeare Quarterly, 26 (1975), 269-275, p. 272. Morris interprets Jaques' seventh age as death rather than old age.

⁷Claudio imagines his spirit's imprisonment in "viewless winds . . . blown with restless violence round about the pendent world" (III.i.118-125).

⁸C. L. Barber, p. 13.

⁹Morris, p. 270. The quotation from As You Like It is found in Riverside, III.ii.301.

¹⁰John Davies in Nosce Tiepsum and Diego de Estella in De Contemptu Mundi, trans. by Thomas Rogers in 1586, both refer to death as the true mirror of humanity. Rolf Soellner discusses these works in Shakespeare's Patterns of Self-Knowledge, p. 106. In The Daunce of Death (Ellesmere MS.), John Lydgate refers to the worm-eaten corpse of the King as a mirror:

Ye folke that loken / vpon this purtrature
 Beholdyng here / alle the estates daunce
 Seeth what ye ben / & what is yowre nature
 Mete vnto wormes / not elles yn substaunce
 And haue this myrroure / euer yn remembraunce
 how I lye here / som-tyme crowned kyng
 To al estates / a trewe resemblaunce
 That wormes fode / is fyne of owre lyuyng.

(633-640)

The Ellesmere MS., as well as the Lansdown MS., of Lydgate's Daunce is edited by Florence Warren for the Early English Text Society (Oxford Univ. Press, 1931). The passage quoted is found on p. 74. Also see The Glasse of Vaine-Glorie, trans. from St. Augustine's Speculum Peccatoris by W. P. (London: John Winder, 1587).

CHAPTER III
"GRAVES YAWN AND YIELD YOUR DEAD":
DEATH, HUMOR, AND THE CRISIS OF FAITH
IN MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Central to life in Shakespeare's Messina is the incertitude of reality. The merry tone of the opening acts emphasizes the creative function of illusion, for dissembling allows freedom for the play of humor and the growth of love. The rapid flow of wit, particularly the sparkling repartee of Beatrice and Benedick, indicates a comic world of unexpected reversals and necessarily swift adaptations. Just as these exchanges delight us, they also suggest the precarious stance of humanity in a world of indetermined flux. The ease with which structures may be obscured indeed points to hidden dangers, for when treacherously applied, duplicity may undermine bonds of friendship and love. Since multiple meanings are necessary for innocent play as well as for treachery, the real threat to happiness cannot be insubstantiality. The menace is rather scepticism, a propensity to doubt what lies beyond one's comprehension or control.

Distrust becomes a recurrent motif of the play, entering into the playful rivalry of Beatrice and Benedick as well as the Petrarchan courtship of Hero and Claudio. Benedick's merry remarks on cuckoldry, "In faith, hath not the world one man but he will wear his cap with suspicion?" (I.i.197-99) and Beatrice's allusions to Benedick's faithlessness, his winning of her heart "with false dice"

(II.i.280-81), suggest the fear of love, a fear that later destroys Claudio's affections. The serious implications of distrust thus unfold when Claudio, plagued by fear of betrayal and dishonor, withdraws his love from Hero, and so isolates himself from the community of Messina. Hero's collapse at his accusations signifies both the death of his love and the death of her honor, the irreparable damage which faithlessness may cause. Yet even death, as the renaissance well knew, may bring forth greater good. Felix culpa was, after all, a familiar theme, central not only to Christian belief in general, but to the tradition of English religious drama in specific. The sins of Adam and Eve while they brought death into the world paradoxically made possible the Incarnation and the Redemption. Like the sacrifice of Christ, Hero's mock death represents not only the blindness of self-trust but also the insubstantiality of death itself countered by love and faith. Her feigned death thus becomes the fulcrum that makes comedy in this shifting world possible. Hero's sacrifice alone is not sufficient, however, to redeem Claudio. It is Claudio who must repent his error and demonstrate his faith. And it is the community of Messina and the audience who must forgive Claudio's wavering trust.

Though faith is an issue paramount to each relationship, the two sets of lovers provide a contrast not to be found in the other comedies. For while humor and merriment characterize the courtship of Beatrice and Benedick, destruction centers in the romance of Hero and Claudio. We have only to remember the indistinguishable lovers of A Midsummer Night's Dream to realize that here Shakespeare is

using the tension of polarities to modulate and enrich audience response. As the relationships of the lovers differ, so too do their affections follow different paths. For while the romance of Claudio and Hero moves from happiness to calamity, ending with sudden reversal, the story of Beatrice and Benedick follows a generally upward course. The growing affections of Beatrice and Benedick, as well as their spontaneity and mirth, counteract our fear of permanent disaster when Claudio denounces his bride.

While pride proves detrimental to the love of Claudio and Hero, it plays an equivocal role in the courtship of Benedick and Beatrice. Pride serves as a force of attraction for the loquacious pair, just as it keeps them cautiously on guard. Their high esteem for independence finds expression in verbal rivalry. Yet while their "merry war" reflects high spiritedness, the couple's enjoyment of language and people points to a capacity for trust and love. Enveloped in the ambience of humor and playfulness, pride is disarmed of its destructive qualities. The war of wit thus becomes primarily a device of love. A battle of the sexes indeed provides an excellent excuse for contact. In the name of combat, rivals may seek each other's company and may speak each other's name, though always contemptuously. When the messenger of the opening scene brings news of recent battle, Beatrice uses the license of an enemy to broach the subject of Benedick. With a hint of bawdry and a sarcastic jibe at male pretensions to heroism, Beatrice inquires, "I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the war or no?" (I.i.30-31). For Beatrice, affections gain freedom behind the mask of disdain. Like

the play of wit, where meanings dissolve at will, the play of love requires manipulation and subterfuge, attack and counter-attack.

Although Benedick and Beatrice suppress their affections, objective observers sense their compatibility. Don Pedro particularly notices their suitability, and so counters their defenses with an ambush. Ironically the "love god" Don Pedro and his attendants Claudio and Leonato give Benedick a lesson in humility only to later fall victims themselves to pride. By allowing Beatrice and Benedick to overhear their faults, the plotters hope to chasten their conceit. From their new humility, love will surely spring. This treachery to unmask love, Hero explains, is of "little Cupid's crafty arrow made/ That only wounds by hearsay" (III.i.22-23). Like the "merry war," the plot of Don Pedro, while it involves duplicity, promises happiness and love. Play's triumph over pride assures us of a similar victory when after the accusations of Claudio, the Friar advises Leonato to let Hero "awhile be secretly kept in./ And publish it that she is dead indeed . . . " (IV.i.203-04). Charmed by the magic of comedy, the Friar's game, like Don Pedro's, is marked for success.

In Messina, humor and playfulness draw into a close alliance with faith, and it is not by accident that Beatrice, who is superior to all characters in wit, excels also in trust. Her lively jests force even her worthiest rival into retreat. Angered by her latest victory, Benedick complains that he stood before her "like a man at the mark, with a whole army shooting at me" (II.i.246-47). Beatrice surpasses her rival, for she more adeptly entertains possibilities

inherent in the irrational. When informed that she takes her jests from "A Hundred Merry Tales" (II.i.130), Beatrice continues the game and retaliates in kind. Benedick, however, when similarly attacked, cannot sustain distance but questions whether the world indeed thinks him a fool. Though Beatrice submits only imaginatively and temporarily to the counter-construct she provides (for to submit fully would be to take the part of Dogberry), her flirtation with chaos demonstrates not only intellectual subtlety, but also trust in the face of insubstantiality. Beatrice is not paralyzed by fear of the unknowable world, but finds in it possibilities of pleasure and delight. William G. McCullom explains that her wit, as well as Benedick's, "proves to be an Erasmian sensitivity to one's own folly."¹ By coming to an understanding of themselves early in the play, Beatrice and Benedick are ready to demonstrate their faith when Hero is accused.

Beatrice thus places in relief less merry and less trusting characters. As mistress of wit, she opposes Don John who will "smile at no man's jests" (I.ii.14). For while Don John desires to concentrate his power by annihilating what he cannot understand, Beatrice extends her psychic sphere to include elements of the irrational. Beatrice even exceeds Hero's closest relative in faith. Leonato's prayer for Hero's death exudes self-pitying remorse. Although Leonato claims that he has loved Hero so "That I myself was to myself not mine" (IV.i.138), he clearly wishes to disengage himself from Hero's shame: "Do not live, Hero, do not open thine eyes;/ For did I think thou wouldst not quickly die,/ Thought I

thy spirits were stronger than thy shames,/ Myself would on the rearward of reproaches,/ Strike at thy life . . . " (123-27).

Leonato fears the dissolution of his own identity in Hero's dishonor, for his daughter's dishonor means his own. He thus cuts away that part of himself that he believes to be diseased. Like the fool of the medieval moral play who stumbles into Death while attempting to escape him,² Leonato seeks to avoid dishonor and impotence only to find himself helpless and disgraced. Leonato's intolerance becomes his most dangerous enemy. Though the priest persuades Leonato of Hero's innocence, Leonato's pride is not chastened. If Hero is not to blame for discrediting his name, then Claudio must be. Leonato thus vents all of his anger on Claudio. When we next see Leonato in Act V, scene 1, Antonio is warning him of his self-destructive anger: "If you go on thus, you will kill yourself; / And 'tis not wisdom thus to second grief/ Against yourself" (1-3). Leonato's self-dissolving pride becomes most evident in the farcical episode that follows when Leonato and Antonio challenge Claudio and Don Pedro to fight. Like the self-divisible fool Launcelot in The Merchant of Venice, who debates with himself the merits and dangers of leaving Shylock's service, Leonato seems to split in half before our eyes. Infected by Leonato's testy sense of honor, Antonio becomes Leonato's identical twin in rage and indignity. As the two old men rant before Claudio and Don Pedro, they seem ridiculous and feeble miniatures of their former selves. The Prince's mockery, "What think'st thou? Had we fought, I doubt we should have been too young for them" (V.i.117-19), is the only honor conferred on Leonato for all his

attempts to redeem his dignity. Don Pedro, who had honored Leonato with a letter and with a visit in Act I, now only scoffs at the irascible old man.

Just as Beatrice goes beyond Leonato in faith, she likewise exceeds Claudio. For, unlike Claudio, who requires verification of Hero's innocence, Beatrice instinctively asserts her trust: "O, on my soul, my cousin is belied!" (IV.i.146). When Claudio confesses that he has wronged Hero, he indicates that his sin was not one of malice but rather one of error: "Yet sinn'd I not, / But in mistaking" (V.i.274-75). Claudio receives further justification from Leonato who explains that the Count and the Prince were innocent victims who accused Hero "upon the error that you heard debated" (V.iv.3). Although much of Claudio's guilt is here diverted to the villains Don John and Boracio so that Claudio may again return to the comic circle, the cruelty with which Claudio formerly taunted the wedding party points to a serious defect of faith. On his wedding day, Claudio stands before the Friar, seeming to be an expectant groom. He then scoffs at the wedding vows and mocks the gift he should cherish: "There, Leonato, take her back again. / Give not this rotten orange to your friend" (IV.i.31-32). These abusive words direct our sympathies to the innocent daughter who unexpectedly finds her groom her enemy. Act IV thus conforms to what Kenneth Burke terms in the tragedies the "pity" act.³ Hero, like the tragic heroines Desdemona, Ophelia, and Cordelia, seems an innocent victim bound for sacrifice.

As we respond to Hero's plight, Claudio appears more clearly an undeserving fool. His bullying arrogance, against which Hero's reasonable defense holds no sway, resembles the haughty demeanor of tyrant figures of the Corpus Christi Cycles. Indeed, Claudio exhibits the same blind confidence of Herod in the Wakefield pageant, who by slaughtering the innocents hopes to secure his own power.⁴ Claudio likewise displays some of the humorous characteristics of the tyrant. Angered by the thought of human audacity and imperceptiveness, Claudio exclaims, "O, what men dare do! What men may do! What men daily do, not knowing what they do!" (IV.i.19-20). Irony infuses these words just as it does Herod's vacuous threat to kill the babe of Bethlehem: " . . . that boy shall by for all" (p.444.1.112). Neither Herod nor Claudio understands the true significance of his words. The men thus become comically diminutive as they rage in ignorance and fear. Although we know that Herod and Claudio can create havoc on a limited scale, neither seems powerful enough to alter the ultimate course of cosmic or comic providence. The knowledge of Christ's history and purpose gives perspective to the spectacle of dying children, and a familiarity with the characteristics of genre gives us hope that Hero's dishonor will be temporary. Indeed it seems inevitable, even in the face of Claudio's impatience, that Dogberry will carry the day. Like the Christ child of the cycle, Hero poses no threat to her attacker, but on the contrary, offers a means of deferring death. Hero provides Claudio the opportunity for extension and reidentification. Claudio himself views love and marriage as exchange. When he first learns

that Don Pedro has won Hero for him, he vows: "Lady, as you are mine, I am yours. I give away myself for you and dote upon the exchange" (II.i.308-09). Although Claudio speaks nobly of love, he in truth is not ready to include Hero in his idea of self nor to treat an insult to her honor as an attack on his own. And so too willingly, he heeds the words of a known malcontent, a man "whose spirits," Benedick explains, "toil in frame of villainies" (IV.i.189).

The "mistake" of Claudio thus stems not so much from the trickery of others as from his own deficiency of faith and fear of psychic death. In an illusory world of masks and games, a comic but also a fallen world, faith in love provides a defense against delusion. Yet faith requires humility and the admission of one's own limited perspective. This humility entails a sense of powerlessness, an awareness in fact of one's own link with death. Claudio, however, seeks to preserve his identity at all costs. When he asks rhetorically, "Are our eyes our own?" (IV.i.71), Claudio reveals a staunch reliance on his own senses and his own interpretations. Refusing to doubt himself, Claudio then must doubt Hero. For Claudio, Hero becomes an object upon which all uncertainties fasten. He reiterates her name time and again as though her very name belied meaning. As he rails at Hero's "seeming," unleashing a tirade of equivocal epithets, "most foul, most fair!" "pure impiety and impious purity" (IV.i.103,104), we sense that Claudio's frustration derives as much from his fear of incertitude as from his disappointment in love.

In an effort to stabilize meanings and thus to stabilize his own identity, Claudio looks to tradition. His strict allegiance to a system of personal honor predisposes him to condemn Hero. Even before Don John offers evidence for Hero's infidelity, Claudio entertains the possibility of his bride's unworthiness and contemplates her public denouncement: "If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her tomorrow, in the congregation, where I should wed, there will I shame her" (III.ii.123-25). Claudio feels more than sorrow over the possibility of lost love. He is outraged by the prospect of dishonor. Hero's public humiliation is thus appropriate, for Claudio perceives infidelity to him as a threat to his honor. So, as in a duel, the challenge must be public. In the same spirit of reprisal, Don Pedro offers Claudio his support: "And, as I woo'd for thee to obtain her, I will join with thee to disgrace her" (III.ii.126-27). Hero's collapse on her wedding day will give Claudio's attack even more semblance to a duel and his motive the aspect of revenge. This public confrontation is unprecedented in Shakespeare's sources and analogues. Bandello describes Fenicia's encounter with a messenger who informs her that Sir Timbreo has abandoned her.⁵ Ariosto, on the other hand, does not even show his heroine receiving word of the broken engagement.⁶ The appearance of Claudio's savage denouncement in Shakespeare emphasizes the Count's desire for satisfaction in the eyes of the world. In this quarrel, however, only one opponent is armed, and that person is Claudio. Claudio's weapon is ironically play itself. His mockery of sacred ritual stuns the bridal party as it obliterates their expectations.

Claudio strips humor of its recreative function. Humor becomes satiric, a weapon for attacking. The contrast between the two sets of lovers becomes even more apparent at this point, for while the wit of Beatrice and Benedick reflects free-spirited gaiety, Claudio's shows only fear of dishonor and self-loss.

Claudio's suspicious nature and stringent regard for honor signify this fear of time and death. The idea that honor could mitigate death's harsh reality held sway over the renaissance imagination. Tangible rewards such as titles, property, and dutiful heirs were felt to immortalize a person, to prove the existence of inviolate virtue. Council explains that respect for honor derived from "the pragmatic way in which its ethical implications were applied to the details of public and professional life":

This combination produces a society in which each member can engage in the effort to perform his appropriate role in the expectation of appropriate honourable rewards both tangible and intangible--by being an integral part--no matter how grandiose or trivial--by being an integral part of that society's most pervasive ethical system.⁷

The concept of honor thus encouraged men to virtuous deeds, providing social cohesion and protection for the state. Romei in The Courtiers Academie states: "This honor is that ardent heate which enflameth the minde of man, to glorious enterprises making him audacious against enemies, and to vices timerous."⁸ Act I, scene 1 of Much Ado gives us a demonstration of honor's positive value. The letter and messenger of Don Pedro apprise the Messinians of the exceptional young soldiers who have saved the country. The Prince's praise and the community's respect for these men of distinction should encourage the soldiers'

loyalty. Although the concept of honor was valuable to society, it could also prove dangerous. When regarded too highly, honor could easily foster self-indulgent pride. Hotspur's quest for fame in I Henry IV and Julius Caesar's ambition in Julius Caesar exemplify the destructiveness of honor when prized too highly. While Claudio's respect for honor aids him in meeting his first test of manhood, it prevents success in his second trial. Claudio performs admirably on the military front, because there lines of demarcation are clearly marked. In battle, Claudio confronts death, performing "in the figure of a lamb, feats of a lion" (I.i.14-15). Ironically, the stabilizing power which Claudio hopes to secure must be achieved by direct confrontation with physical death. Placed in the civil arena, however, where innuendo obscures certainty, Claudio finds himself overwhelmed by distrust. Like the tragic heroes, Othello, Macbeth, Coriolanus, and Antony, Claudio who triumphs in martial exploits falls victim to the complexities of society.

The perplexing nature of Messinian society first becomes obvious when characters intermingle at the supper of Leonato. Here love and hate dance behind identical masks. While visors offer lovers license for dissembling and a merry atmosphere for flirtation, they also allow villains to conceal envious schemes. Throughout the play, both Beatrice and Don John are thoroughly engrossed in their private wars. Don John knows that he has lost his place in his brother's affections and so tries to wreak havoc on Don Pedro's favorite, Claudio. Beatrice, feeling that she has lost Benedick's heart, "Marry, once before he won it [Beatrice's heart] with false dice"

(II.i.280-81), seeks to wreak havoc of a different kind on her adversary. Though Don John and Beatrice are masters of warfare, they stand at opposite poles of the comic/tragic spectrum. If Beatrice was born under the light of a dancing star, then Don John was born, like Conrade, under scowling Saturn. As mistress of laughter and faith, Beatrice stands at the center of the comedy, dominating the play from its opening to its close. Don John, on the other hand, represents all that opposes life. A dark, lonely, and desperate figure, he lurks on the edge of the comic circle and finally must leave it all together. At the supper of Leonato, Don John and Beatrice use the same device to frustrate their prey. They give their remarks a stamp of verity by pretending not to recognize their masked conversants. While Beatrice's pretense is merely playful retaliation in an ongoing battle of wit, Don John's feigning is a malicious attempt to arouse jealousy in the unsuspecting Count. Illusion thus provides an opportunity both for innocent sport and for insidious treachery.

Both Beatrice and Don John succeed in their attacks, for they know to target their victims' greatest source of pride. Beatrice knows well Benedick's Achilles heel, because it is likewise her own, a high esteem for independence and wit. She thus disparages Benedick's intelligence by a barrage of merry insults. Pronouncing him "the Prince's jester" (II.i.137), Beatrice sends her rival in hasty retreat. Even more vulnerable to injury, however, is Claudio, whose pride lies in the idea of his lady's perfection. In Act II, when Claudio asks Benedick what he thinks of Hero, a request indicating Claudio's basic insecurity, the Count compares Hero to a priceless

gem, "Can the world buy such a jewel?" (I.i.81). Quick to notice Claudio's perception of Hero as a beautiful, rare possession, Benedick jokingly responds in the affirmative, "Yea, and a case to put it into" (I.i.182). Benedick's reference to marriage as a state portending culkoldry, "In faith, hath not the world one man but he will wear his cap with suspicion?" (I.i.197-99), places in bold relief Claudio's desire for perfection and permanence. Claudio's commitment to the realm of the timeless Platonic Ideas of Beauty, Love, and Honor is indeed a consequence of his fear of mutability and death. According to the courtly love tradition, the beloved serves as the refining agent in the courtier's spiritual development. Romei's Signior Patritio in The Courtiers Academie explains, ". . . humane beauty . . . hath by the chife creator bin produce, amongst al beauties sensible, most excellēt, but to kindle this honest & holy love divine, which vniteth human creature with his creator."⁸ The love of a beautiful, virtuous lady is preliminary to the love of God and is thus the source of the courtier's virtue and honor, and hence of his identity. The prologue to the fourth book of Spenser's Faerie Queene extols love for its ennobling power:

Ne naturall affection faultless blame,
 For fault of few that have abused the same.
 For it of honor and all vertue is
 The roote, and brings forth glorious floures of fame.¹⁰

Though love conventions provide a vehicle for expression, they, like codes of honor, may too rigidly formulate thought and emotion. For Claudio, these artificial restraints prove inadequate for handling Messina's subtle complexities. His adoration cannot withstand the

pressure of uncertainty. Suspicion thus fractures his fragile vision and sends love crashing down. The substitution of events on the eve of his wedding day suggests this shattered illusion. Claudio, who intends to serenade his love from beneath her balcony, finds himself instead crouching silently out of view, expecting proof of betrayal. His disillusionment becomes visually apparent on the following day when Hero, having descended from the safety of her chamber, collapses before Claudio's angry assault. The downward movement of Hero suggests the breaking of an idol. As Hero falls, we feel the catastrophe of lost faith. We sense the growing isolation not only of the doubter Claudio but of all who come within his circle of influence. The play here reaches its lowest ebb. Not only does Claudio leave the church unwed, Hero and all who care for her remain behind, bewildered and distressed.

Isolation, however, as the Friar knows, is only one aspect of death. Death, the nadir of a natural cycle, marks not only the end of a downward movement but also the origin of an upward course. A plot, he surmises, may thus serve to turn deepest grief to greatest joy. We too share the Friar's hope for success, since we know what the Friar does not know, that the bungling night watch has overheard details of Don John's scheme and has already apprehended the accomplice Borachio. It is not sufficient, however, that Dogberry should at this point stumble forth to reveal the cause of confusion. The tragic consequences of Claudio's accusation must be comically played out. Claudio must correct his pride by accepting the finality of death. The Friar suggests that by publishing the fact of Hero's death she may

again reclaim Claudio's heart. On hearing of her death, Claudio should repent his hasty accusation and come again to prize Hero's value: "for it so falls out / That what we have we prize not to the worth / Whiles we enjoy it, but being lack'd and lost, / Why then we rack the value . . . " (IV.i.217-20). Like the story of Antiochenus' son who receives from his father's grave a reminder of his own death (Fig. 5), the news of Hero's death will bring Claudio a personal and intimate message of mortality.¹¹

The game suggested by the Friar resembles a ritual of ancient heritage, the symbolic offering of an innocent's death for the purification of individuals and community. Hero's name is indeed appropriate for the sacrificial role she must play. While she pales beside her brilliant cousin, Hero's lack of color contributes greatly to this symbolic value. Hero alone displays the serenity of uncompromised innocence. Also, enhancing her symbolic significance is her absence from the action between the moment of her death in Act IV and her revival at the close of the play. She is not only dead for Claudio, she is lost to Messina and to us. The guilt that Hero must vanquish by the play of death thus belongs not only to Claudio but also to the house of Leonato and to us. For the repercussions of Claudio's actions are extensive. The manna of atonement must disseminate over a community fragmented not only by Claudio's error but also by its own impatience, its own lack of trust. Like the Messinians, we too are outraged by Claudio's slander of Hero. The Friar's challenge to Hero's family and friends to patience is thus a challenge to us as well. We too must accept the Friar's invitation to

ye voyer alleweel. Hon chere fowlen some son of ye
 pat sayd ye son. Horrybll bestes restes. At ye. ye voyer. & allows sal
 at. + restes. At me. pat sayd ye son. Tary farr flesche. & allows + fadye
 away. Bon so sal yme do p'is nobis so gay. And saye he had some
 p'is s'p'it + hard yis noyse. he went home + gart bying hym a
 paynter. And tyme hed thasme he gart paynt ye byrde of his
 f'nd as he lay i his grime. And desen he was styrrid to any syn. he
 beheld ye p'ynge of his f'nd. Enacoyng. And y' he come fro pe
 orte + s'p'it tyme to ye orte. And on yis dysse he a' come fro
 syne. Ho p' y' s'p'it ordre syn take heed at p'is f'nd. p'it

ffader. In tyme. What d'as you. | G'p'it ad. I d'as art p'notte
 A fowle. p'it. I f'le of ye. | Bon. d'is fowle some sal at of ye
 Horrybll bestes restes. At ye. | G'p'it sal at + rest. At me.
 p'is f'nd. f'lesche. f'lesche + f'adye away. Bon so sal yme do p'is nobis so gay.



Fig. 5. Antiochenus' Son Looks on His Father's Grave, an anonymous illustrated poem (15th century)

play and Hero's sacrifice in order to experience rejuvenation. We must trust in comic providence, surrendering ourselves to the play's destructive and recreative power.

The events that follow Claudio's accusations, Beatrice's desire for revenge, Leonato and Antonio's angry indictments, and Benedick's formal challenge demonstrate in comic vein the confusion that springs from error. Although these threats bear serious implications, we view them with humorous detachment, for the love confessions of Beatrice and Benedick and the entrance of Dogberry and his cohorts remind us that Messina is still a comic world. Humor assures us that confusion will be temporary and mistakes soon rectified. Dogberry's muddled interrogation not only dispells the darker implications of Claudio's action, it helps to neutralize Claudio's guilt. When the constable enlarges upon his own merits, boasting to be "as pretty a piece of flesh as any in Messina" (IV.ii.80), he displays arrogance similar to that of Claudio. Like Claudio, Dogberry lacks self-knowledge. The longer his catalogue of virtues grows, the more times we must write him down an ass. Through Dogberry, the sin of pride is transformed into human folly. As we laugh at this doltish constable, we must show compassion for the more sophisticated fool, Claudio.

Like Dogberry's clownish posturing, the brief and somewhat farcical exchanges between Claudio and Hero's supporters also evoke sympathy for Claudio. Though he still believes his claim to be true, Claudio is nevertheless distressed by these confrontations. He calls himself "high-proof melancholy" (V.i.123) and anxiously seeks to divert his heavy thoughts by recourse to wit. Our anger at Claudio

begins to subside not only because we recognize his suffering, but also because our animosity finds expression in the reproaches of Hero's defenders. Yet while we participate in their attacks, we also sense the foolishness of their enterprise and likewise suspect the foolishness of our own. Leonato and Antonio are indeed pitiful defenders of honor; thus their feeble thrusts smack of the grotesque. Only moments after warning Leonato against impatience, Antonio himself bursts with agitation and cannot be calmed. His effusive name-calling indeed reminds us of the vacuous threats of a familiar stage figure, the miles gloriosus. Unlike the boasts of the conventional comic figure, however, Antonio's threats appear hollow not because of cowardice, but because of his age. Thus as Antonio and Leonato rage, they evoke pity as well as laughter. They would indeed snap off the Count and the Prince's "two noses" (V.i.115) though they had no teeth. Bemoaning Hero's death in extravagant fashion, the old men seem mocking shadows of Claudio and Don Pedro, who were themselves sporting for a duel just earlier. Like Dogberry, Antonio and Leonato deflect Claudio's guilt by indulging their own prickly tempers. Even Beatrice who has formerly demonstrated her faith now becomes a victim to rage and enlists Benedick to "Kill Claudio" (IV.i.289). As all Messina becomes swept into the torrent of pride, Claudio seems less a culprit and more a man who like so many is only foolishly blind. The confusion that follows Claudio's assault becomes not only a comic metaphor for the destructive consequences of pride; by dispersing Claudio's guilt, it gives impetus to his return to Messinian society. Thus while Claudio goes out of favor by denouncing Hero in

Act IV, he begins his return to favor through the serio-farcical conflicts of Act V.

The game instituted by the Friar both infuses the turmoil of Messina and dissolves our fear of lasting confusion. The frequent mention of Hero's death by the challengers, as it nettles Claudio's conscience, reminds us that Hero is not really dead at all. Since Claudio has not literally "killed a sweet lady" (V.i.148), the challenges may be easily rescinded. Although the attackers seem at times duped by their own fiction, our sensitivity to it assures us that this confusion is restrained by a larger order, by the stratagem of the Friar. Not until Borachio's confession, however, does Claudio feel the harsh impact of the Friar's deceit. Claudio's response to this admission expresses the intensity of his grief: "I have drunk poison whiles he utter'd it" (V.i.246). Hero's image, as the Friar had hoped, is resurrected in the mind of Claudio. Spurred by his sorrow and regret, Claudio places himself in the hands of Leonato. Leonato's selection of Claudio's penance is appropriate for his crime: for as Claudio has run from death, he must now reflect on death, and as he has defamed Hero, he must now restore her name. Although Claudio's epitaph centers on a familiar theme, the stabilizing power of honor, it is now Hero's name and not his own which he seeks to redeem. By praising Hero, Claudio indirectly admits his own impatience and pride.

Death in guerdon of her wrongs,
Gives her fame which never dies.

So the life that died with shame
Lives in death with glorious fame.

(V.iii.5-8)

This attempt to draw Hero from the obscurity of death seems a feeble defense against the leveling power of death. The mourners must sense this too, for as they ceremoniously circle Hero's tomb, a song begins which invokes the night and the dead to aid their rites:

Midnight, assist our moan;
Help us to sigh and groan,
 Heavily, heavily.
Graves, yawn and yield our dead,
Till death be uttered,
Heavily, heavily.

(V.iii.16-21)

This song imbues nature and death with animistic qualities. Personification becomes more than an aesthetic device; it reflects the mourners' desires to connect with mysteries beyond comprehension, to humanize and thus to make accessible the sacred. The supplication, with its incantatory rhythm and evocative imagery, suggests a pagan world in which men and natural forces not only coexist but are spiritually bound.

Claudio's penance ended, his final test of faith must begin. When Claudio and Don Pedro arrive at Leonato's, the masked ladies approach, and Claudio willfully inquires which one he must take for his bride. While the masks contribute to the wonder of Hero's revival, they also imply Claudio's willingness to play, to join in a world that he can never fully know. The sense of awe surrounding Hero's unveiling finds a complement in the playful combat that begins

when Beatrice unmask. Humor blends with our sense of wonder, naturalizing the mystery of death and rebirth. Both Benedick and Claudio are now anxious to embark on uncharted seas. The merry allusions to cuckoldry and to the waywardness of husbands reflect mild apprehensions of days to come. Present joys and hopeful expectations, however, dwarf these apprehensions. So merry is Benedick in fact that a "college of witcrackers" (V.iv.100-01) cannot dampen his mood. While hearts are merry, troubles seem far away. A kiss thus serves to stop the mouth of clever Beatrice, and music and dancing drive away thoughts of villains. So happy are these grooms that Don Pedro appears gloomy by comparison. The theme of cuckoldry that Benedick used to flout marriage-minded Claudio in Act I, Benedick now employs to mock the bachelor. "Prince thou art sad," observes Benedick, "Get thee a wife, get thee a wife. There is no staff more reverend than one tipp'd with horn" (V.iv.122-23). Marriage, though fraught with peril, is still superior to the single life. This is Benedick's message to the Prince and to us, for transition is the only constant of a mutable world and an embracing of time the only means by which we triumph over death.

Notes

¹William G. McCollum, "The Role of Wit in Much Ado About Nothing," Shakespeare Quarterly 19 (1968), 172.

²Weber, pp. 82-83. Weber thinks that in the Middle Ages figures dressed in black tight-fitting clothes with skeletons painted on them to represent Death or the dead took part in a play using a Dance of Death motif. At times, Weber believes, a stage fool was introduced who would lay many plots to escape Death, yet by his antics was brought more fully into Death's grip.

³Kenneth Burke, Perspectives by Incongruity, ed. Stanley Edgar Hyman (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1964), p. 162.

⁴"Herod the Great" from Wakefield in Medieval Drama, ed. David Bevington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975), p. 446, ll. 298-310.

⁵Lucca, La Prima Parte De Le Novelle Del Bandello, Novella XXII, trans. Geoffrey Bullough in The Comedies, Vol. II of Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, ed. Bullough (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 118.

⁶Ludovico Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, Bk. V, trans. Sir John Harington in ed. Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources, Vol. II.

⁷Norman Council, When Honour's at the Stake: Ideas of Honour in Shakespeare's Plays (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1973), p. 15. According to Council, this Aristotelian conception of honor was the most orthodox view during Elizabeth's reign. Council uses Robert Ashley's On Honour as a representative text on the subject. "Honor," explains Ashley, "ys a certeine testimonie of vertue shining of yt self, geven of some man by the iudgement of good men. . . ." For Ashley, honor is necessary for promoting goodness in both individuals and society: "For how can vertue stand yf you take away honour?" (p. 15). Shakespeare's sonnet no. 18 "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day" asserts honor's immortalizing power: "So long as men can breath or eyes can see, / So long lives this [the poetic tribute] and this gives life to thee" (Riverside, p. 1752).

⁸Count Annibale Romei, The Courtiers Academie in The English Experience: Its Record in Early Printed Books, Published in Facsimile (New York: Da Capo Press, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Ltd, 1969), p. 78.

⁹Romei, p. 19.

¹⁰Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, IV, Prologue in The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser: In Three Volumes, Vol. II (first published, 1909) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 3, B2.

¹¹Gray, pp. 118, 206-207. The illustration shows the late Emperor's son looking at his father's worm-infested body as it lies in the grave. When the young Emperor addresses his father, "Fader sum tyme what was thou" a voice replies, "Swilk as I was artu nowe / / Thou sal cum and reste with me."

CHAPTER IV
FOOLISH KNAVERY:
COMIC EVIL IN THE TRAGICOMEDIES

When we turn from the romantic comedies to the tragicomedies All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure, we notice a significant change in humor's relation to death. In the early comedies, humor opposes death in an obvious and direct way, for laughter clearly links with creative forces, such as self-knowledge and love. Many benevolent characters in these plays, like Rosalind, Portia, Beatrice, and Benedick, display sparkling wit and gaiety. Other characters, those who are generous but less skilled in verbal arts, reveal a potential for love by their associations with fools and revelers. The motley crew of Olivia's household, Sir Toby, Maria, and Feste, point to Olivia's capacity for love while Bassanio's merry companions, Gratiano and the jester Lancelot, foreshadow his good fortune. And just as gaiety and love draw together, moroseness links with treachery. Don John, Duke Frederick, Oliver de Boys, and Shylock exemplify the alliance of frowning with viciousness. While humor is directly antagonistic to death in the romantic comedies, it opposes death indirectly in the tragicomedies. In these plays, the comedic burden rests not with sympathetic or worthy characters but with murderers, knaves, and bawds. Parolles and Lavatch provide comic mirrors and foils in All's Well while Lucio, Pompey, Mistress

Overdone, and Barnardine supply a sportive, underworld humor in Measure for Measure. These characters are clearly children of the medieval Vice. They mock the serious world and are mocked by it. As we ridicule them, we scorn death which provides their fundamental, final meaning. While these scurvy specimens indulge merrily in their villainies, charitable characters, such as Helena, the King of France, Isabella, and Duke Vincentio, display little levity. Their sobriety, by contrast to the free-spiritedness of the rogues, emphasizes the dialectic of good and evil that operates throughout the plays.

This shift in humor's relation to destructive forces indicates a radical change in dramatic consequence. Humor's alignment with self-knowledge and happiness in the early comedies suggests a classical admiration for all humanity and an innocent delight in the things of this world. These comedies indeed reflect the essence of renaissance humanism. And their playful investigation of ideas and institutions along with their half-serious, half-mocking intimations of social perfectibility contribute to their current popularity. Less understood and appreciated are the values and traditions that underlie All's Well and Measure for Measure, for these works reflect a medieval awareness of mortality and sin. To better appreciate the unusual quality of these plays, we may examine a distinction drawn by Ben Jonson between two states of virtue:

Not to know vice at all, and keepe true state,
 Is vertue, and not Fate:
 Next, to that vertue, is to know vice well,
 And her blacke spight expell.

("Epode," 1-4)¹

Two different comic perspectives are suggested by Jonson's passage. Shakespeare's early comedies correspond to the first state mentioned; for in these works, evil seems unsubstantial and unreal. Love, gaiety, and farce tend to inoculate the romance world against corruption. Even in The Merchant of Venice, a play bridging the festive comedies and the darker tragicomedies, calamity seems unlikely. The gaiety of the maskers, the music of Belmont, the escape of Launcelot and Jessica from Shylock's household, and the wit and playfulness of Portia provide strong assurances that neither Shylock's malice nor the Christians' arrogance will dissolve the comic world. In these romantic comedies, death and vice provide intrigue, tension, and speculative interest, but they rarely endanger the play's comic integrity.

All's Well and Measure for Measure, however, are comedies of a different kind. They resemble the second state which Jonson describes. They do not suggest primal innocence but a world lost and reclaimed. Evil and death now become substantial and sinister, and even love provides no guarantee of withstanding pain. In these plays we become acutely aware of the restrictions imposed by mortality and of humanity's almost compulsive desire to defy these confines. We sympathize with the raging soul's strivings for independence and stability, but we realize as well that rebellion against immutable laws will only draw one into closer confinement. To try to escape mortality, to live as though one will never die, is, as Duke Vincentio explains, to be Death's fool: "For him thou labor'st by thy flight to shun, / And yet run'st toward him still" (III.i.12-13). Happiness

cannot be found by resisting limitations but by acquiescing in one's mortal nature.

The power of the tragicomedies thus derives from portraying a world that thrives by restraining the disintegrating forces within it. The tension between comic deformity and sublime order creates a gothic beauty, intermingling fear and hope. The arts of the middle ages display this same antithesis and may indeed shed some light on Shakespeare's comedy of evil. The medieval church, whose facade contrasts the surreal shapes of beasts with the reposed countenance of saints, reminds us that fear must never be totally absent when meditating on God, for the seeds of pride lie in complacency. In medieval art, the grotesque does not excite terror for its own sake but rather inspires uneasiness to enhance the sublime. The grotesque animates and enlivens an otherwise static spiritual world. By allowing a glimpse of the hideous torments which await unrepentant man, the entire panorama of good and evil gains immediacy and significance. Evil's bestial appearance induces fear as it reminds us that through our own appetites, we partake of the grotesque. Yet while evil's bestial countenance induces anxiety, it simultaneously offers assurance by indicating evil's inferior status on the ladder of being. Gargoyles, chimeras, and devils are comical as well as bestial. Their ludicrous grimaces and vacuous stares reinforce our sense of evil's final defeat by the forces of good. Our laughter attests both to our recognition of evil's folly and impotence and to our own immunity. Thus as gothic art mingles terror with laughter, it

leads its viewer between the two most dangerous spiritual chasms, presumption and despair.

In moral drama and in the later interludes, this tension is equally important. It is sustained even at the play's end. After the protagonist returns to God, the play will often shift its attention from the action to the audience. A virtuous character steps forward to remind us that the battle against evil must be continually waged from day to day in our own hearts. At the close of the Castle of Perseverance, for example, the Father Sitting in Judgement warns that while those who do good shall be brought to bliss, those who do evil "scul to helle-lake / In bitter balys to be brent . . . / / All men example hereat may take / To maintein the goode and mendyn here mis" (3639-44).² We are not allowed repose at the play's end but must remain constantly vigilant. The vices in some plays are shackled and led away at the play's close, but even so, we suspect their escape. In the interlude Wealth and Health, Remedy restrains the vices Ill Will and Shrewd Wit. Ill Will, however, taunts his jailer and the audience: "Lock us up, and keep us as fast as ye can, / Yet Ill-Will and Shrewd Wit shall be with many a man."³ We move from the play with mingled hope and apprehension, aware both of evil's resilience and of its ultimate weakness in the face of good.

In a similar way, Shakespeare's tragicomedies close on an unsettling note. We are relieved that dire events can take so happy a turn but are disturbed by the neatness with which complex problems are dismissed. Having witnessed the repeated cruelties of Bertram and Angelo, we are acutely sensitive to the tenacity of vice. Parolles'

unabashed return to Rossillion at the end of All's Well and Lucio's burr-like tenacity and Barnardine's pardon in Measure for Measure increase our awareness of evil's resilience. Lavatch has told us that "things may serve long, but not serve ever," and a part of us fears that Helena and Mariana may one day exclaim like the cynical fool, "I ne'er had worse luck in my life in my 'O Lord, sir [, spare not me]!" (II.ii.57-58). We also are troubled by the glimpses we have taken of our own images in the protagonists' frailties and in the fools' clever quips. Lavatch implicates us as well as himself in his observation that one may wear "the surplice of humility over the black gown of a big heart" (I.iii.94-95). Unable to accept Bertram and Angelo as fully as do Helena and Isabella, we are cautioned to examine our own charity and faith. The plays thus attempt to bring not only the characters but also the audience to humility. There is no feeling of uninhibited exhilaration at the closing of the comic circles but reservations concerning both the viability of the circle and our own right to participate in it. The plays are not defective, however, in ending on an unsteady note, for they, like their medieval analogues, attempt to guide their viewers between complacency and despair. Only a mingling of dread and hope will allow us to engage in the play's comic close, and this the plays strive to ensure.

Notes

¹Ben Jonson, The Forest in The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson, ed. William B. Hunter, Jr. (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1963), p. 96.

²The Castle of Perseverance in Medieval Drama, ed. David Bevington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975), p. 900.

³Wealth and Health in Early English Dramatists: Recently
Recovered "Lost" Tudor Plays With Some Others, ed. John S. Farmer (New
York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1966), p. 306.

CHAPTER V
"SO THERE'S MY RIDDLE: ONE THAT'S DEAD IS QUICK--":
THE RIDDLER DEATH IN ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

When the King delivers the epilogue at the close of All's Well That Ends Well, he underscores an idea central to the play: happiness and renewal require mutual support and affection. A successful performance, he explains, depends not only on the actor's enthusiasm but also on the audience's good will:

All is well ended, if this suit be won,
That you express content; which we will pay,
With strife to please you, day exceeding day.
Ours be our patience then, and yours our parts;
Your gentle hands lend us, and take our hearts.

(2-6)

The re-creation of society, like the recreation of the play, comes through interaction and reciprocation. This is the lesson that Bertram must learn in order to become the true Count of Rossillion, and it is the teaching what we must accept for the entertainment to be "well ended." Through Bertram we must realize our own insufficiency and dependence. Renaissance Christians understood that man by his very nature is incomplete. He is deficient and partial as he is mortal. In Holy Dying Jeremy Taylor expresses a commonplace of the day when he says, "Every day's necessity calls for reparation of that portion which death fed on all night, when we lay in his lap. . . .

While we think a thought, we die; and the clock strikes, and reckons on our portion of eternity. . . . "¹ Death does not come at once but feeds upon us daily. We are never whole, for as "we form our words with the breath of our nostril--we have the less to live upon for every word we speak." Death can be defeated and people made complete only by love. This is the theme of Taylor's discourse and is the truth which Bertram must learn. The comedy of evil, which is also the comedy of death, indicates the dreadful consequences of Bertram's failure to know his own mortality. Believing the illusion of stability imaged in his youth and honor, Bertram partakes of the deadly natures of proud Parolles and licentious Lavatch. We remember the comical figures Pride and Lechery, two of the famous Seven Deadly Sins, who frequent the medieval stage. Our recognition of the linkage of laughter and death in these grotesques and in their heirs Parolles and Lavatch points to the precarious state of Bertram, who shares in their folly. But just as humor points to the humiliation of Bertram, it also allows him to escape perpetual shame. Parolles' alliance with Bertram recalls the psychomachia of earlier drama, the battle between virtue and vice for the soul of mankind. The moral conflict indicates the hero's mental anguish. Although Bertram fails miserably in his spiritual war, his frustration induces our pity. Our tolerance is also increased by our own sense of security. As humor helps us to see evil's true nature, its absurdity and impotence, it allows us immunity. This sense of protection then tempers our response to foolish young Bertram. The comedy of evil thus serves to indict Bertram as it allows for his return to Helena and France.

Bertram's fear of dependency and death manifests itself in his rejection of marriage. Marriage clearly signifies the process of aging and the constraints of time. Bertram's denial of Helena is perhaps more understandable than Angelo's rejection of Mariana in Measure for Measure. For while Angelo was free to select his wife, Bertram is not. Indeed, we might be inclined to sympathize fully with a young man compelled to marry not only a woman he does not love but also one so far beneath him in social status. Shakespeare, however, carefully composes the action of All's Well so that Helena, and not Bertram, receives our sympathy.

In Act I, an important opposition arises that will strengthen our attachment to Helena and will contribute to our dissatisfaction with Bertram. The antithesis is that of illusory death and illusory life. Decay and darkness pervade Rossillion in the opening scene, for there memories of the dead blend with expectations of future sorrow. The countess recalls the deaths of her noble husband and of his good physician Narbon. And Lafew relates the seriousness of the King's disease, an illness for which all hope of recovery has been lost. Like the King, the Countess and her friend Lafew are the last vestiges of a noble but passing age. It is not surprising that a high spirited youth such as Bertram would wish to escape the oppressive atmosphere of France where the mind is constantly drawn to the grave.

The grave, however, is precisely where Bertram's thoughts should linger, for there paradoxically lies the hope both for his own happiness and for the future of France. The mutual admiration of the King and the Count of Rossillion and that of the Count of Rossillion

and Narbon suggest that in former years the state at large was sound. The King's strength and love flowed outwardly to his subjects and was then gathered and returned to nourish and replenish his power. This healthy exchange between the Kingdom's center and its perimeter now appears to be breaking down, and its dissolution is symbolically manifested in the King's fistula. The dead and the aged do not portend the demise of the empire; they rather offer the new age a legacy of honor and strength. Bertram's father leaves his son the highest example of nobility, devotion to family and King, while Helena's father wills her the secrets of healing and his own model of goodness. To accept the heritage of the dead, one must also accept one's kinship with death and the responsibilities which mortality implies. We may remember a fifteenth century illustrated poem that describes the son of Antiochenus as he looks upon his father's worm-eaten corpse. A voice warns the proud young man, "Swilk as I was artu now. . . . Thow sal cum and reste with me."² The grave of Count Rossillion, like that of Antiochenus, offers a means of self-knowledge. The admission of limitation, however, is tremendously difficult for the inexperienced young Count. His opening lines indicate his disdain for any form of confinement: " . . . I must attend his Majesty's command, to whom I am now in ward, evermore in subjection" (I.i.4-5). The final phrase, though ostensibly a pledge of faith, suggests harbored resentment.

Hoping the best for Bertram but fearing his inexperience, the Countess sends him on his way with much good advice and with the respected old man Lafew. She instructs Lafew, "Tis an unseason'd

courtier, good my lord, / Advise him" (I.i.71). Through his mother's concern, we sense Bertram's vulnerability as he sets forth to meet the challenges of manhood. Her tears and warnings presage the perilous tests which await her son. The Countess is right to mourn Bertram's parting for his journey marks the inevitable changes which occur in the relationship of a mother and son when a boy reaches manhood. The period of mourning, however, provides time for adjustment, and though the Countess grieves as Bertram departs, she soon demonstrates her acceptance of change. By the end of the act, she will have given Helena her blessings as a prospective daughter-in-law. Thus while the Countess' grief and anxiety enable us to see Bertram's journey as a significant event marking the unavoidable alterations of life, her own positive response to mutability places in relief the obstinacy of Bertram in the following act.

As Bertram leaves with his guardian Lafew, another courtier comes to center stage. It is flamboyant and comical Parolles, a man who Helena privately explains is a "notorious liar, / . . . a great way fool, soly a coward" (I.i.100-01). Parolles is energetic, witty, and colorful. His brilliance, however, is like a flame that tempts its victims by a show of life only to reveal at last its true and deadly nature. Just as Lafew and France suggest life in death, Parolles and the Florentine wars indicate death in life. As Helena completes her description of Parolles, her words connote the traditional antithesis of the psychomachia:

Yet these fix'd evils sit so fit in him,
That they take place when virtue's steely bones

Looks bleak i' th' cold wind. Withal, full oft we see
Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly.

(I.i.102-04)

The words "take place" suggest that good and evil are not passive elements but are active agents contesting for power in the human heart. Bertram is specifically suggested by these lines, for it is he who has taken Parolles as a companion and friend. Implanted in Helena's words is the disturbing assumption that virtue is less appealing than vice. In the early comedies the inverse is true, for goodness goes hand in hand with laughter. In the world of the tragicomedies, however, virtue has "steely bones" and looks "bleak i' th' cold wind." To be virtuous is to lead an often painful and frustrating existence, like that of Helena and Isabella. The struggle, if it is justified at all, is justified by the end reward: "What e'er the course, the end is the renown" (IV.iv.36). Helena's words do not endorse the Machiavellian ethic that ends justify means but reveal her faith in the Christian consolation that human sorrow will finally be crowned with joy. "All's Well That Ends Well" is both the central tenet of medieval Christianity and is the premise underlying Shakespeare's tragicomedies.

Although Parolles personifies hypocrisy and dissimulation, he significantly deceives no one in the play except Bertram. Helena, Lafew, the Countess, and the French lords all know almost upon sight that Parolles is a foolish, scurvy fellow. And we, the members of the audience, are also quick to recognize Parolles's arrogance and stupidity. His elaborate dress, effusive language, and ostentatious

manners make him a ridiculous figure. This ready recognition of Parolles' folly by so many characters and by us suggests that evil in the tragicomic world is not difficult to discern if one really wishes to see it. Unlike Iago, the sinister Vice figure in *Othello*, who fools virtually everyone in the play, Parolles deceives only proud, young Bertram.

As we laugh at Parolles, we also laugh at Bertram who is so completely duped by the coxcomb. Our laughter and derision ironically soften the effect of Bertram's reprehensible conduct. We experience comic release, for we realize, through humor, the impotence and folly of evil. According to Charlotte Spivack, evil was regarded throughout both the middle ages and the renaissance, not as a positive force, but as the absence or privation of being. According to this theory, things which are spiritual are real while those which are material are unreal. Evil, because it depends upon matter for its existence, is unsubstantial, and its pretensions to power are intrinsically laughable. Evil is a "shadow asserting substance, a nothing masquerading as something. It becomes a butt of humor to anyone who recognizes it as an important monster thundering in a void."³ The devils and tyrants of the mystery cycles and the vices of the moral plays, for all their boasts of prowess and cunning, inevitably succumb to God's will. Their treachery, like Parolles', redounds to their own misery. We remember in Mankind New-Guise's farcical self-entrapment when attempting to drive Mankind to despair. Just when New-Guise places a noose around his own neck to demonstrate hanging, Mercy appears. The frightened vices scurry away, all but New-Guise who

succeeds only in tightening the noose and falling to the ground. Like New-Guise, Parolles is continually foiled by his own devices. His scarves, bannerets, and courtly airs, though intended to disguise his inner hollowness, betray him for a fool. We laugh at Parolles' self-defeat and suspect as well that Bertram will eventually ensnare himself by his folly.

As Parolles speaks with Helena, a page enters with a message: "Monsieur Parolles, my lord calls you" (I.i.187). Bertram's sending for Parolles suggests the young Count's own responsibility for his acquaintance with vice. Parolles is not a mere parasite; he is encouraged by Bertram to be a friend and confidant. It is this friendship that in large part directs our responses to Bertram throughout the play. To understand the nature of this relationship, we may examine the connection between the ancestral Vice and humanum genus. In the moral plays and interludes, the Vice plays an ambiguous role in relation to the protagonist. On the one hand, the Vice represents an internal attribute of the hero himself. He is a component of the protagonist's moral character. As the Vice takes a tangible, dramatic form, however, he attains external value as well. He becomes the intriguer par excellence, maneuvering the material world to taunt and frustrate his victim. The doubleness of the Vice enables the medieval playwright to do several things. As an internal aspect of man, the Vice reinforces the idea that the hero is fully responsible for his fall. He is not merely the innocent victim of a wily trickster, but is self-tempted and self-deceived. As the Vice possesses an independent character, however, he lends sympathy to the

struggling hero. The more inventive and scheming the Vice, the more sympathy we feel for the protagonist. Contradictory impulses work to make us care for the fate of humanum genus while acknowledging human responsibility and the fairness of God's judgment. Unlike his ancestral Vice, Parolles' role as intriguer is small. He encourages Bertram's wickedness but plans only one scheme, the false pursuit of the drum. This plan he feels forced to devise when his bluff is called by Bertram. The real schemers in the drum episode, however, are the French lords who set up the ruse to entrap Parolles. Thus Parolles seems less a master strategist than a comical echo of Bertram's foolishness, a replica of the young man's vicious impulses.

The opposition between vice and virtue crystalizes in Act II. For the first time, we see Parolles and Lafew together and in the presence of Bertram. As the counselors discuss the miraculous recovery of the King, they speak as a single, though somewhat agitated, mind, each closing the sentences of the other. Wanting to appear eloquent in Bertram's presence but lacking true feeling for the King's recovery, Parolles can only parrot, "just you say well; so would I have said" (II.iii.19). The opposing elements of the psychomachia cannot subsist quietly for long, however. Sensing a rival in the old man, Parolles tries to dominate the "monologue." Parolles at last breaks into his stride, but as he is about to suggest some practical uses for the miraculous healing power, Lafew cuts him short and returns the discussion to its proper focus, the King's recovery. Lafew thus checks Parolles' attempt to demystify the miracle of grace.

Although tension here exists between the two men, they do not become openly antagonistic until Bertram's first rejection of Helena. When Parolles reacts disbelievingly to Bertram's retraction of this refusal, Lafew realizes how dangerous and foolish this surly captain is. Without hesitating, Lafew begins his personal scourge of this "general offense." Like Mercy in Mankind, who threatens the vices with punishment, Lafew too feels compelled to scourge vice. Indeed, all men in Lafew's view are obliged to beat Parolles: "I think thou wast created for men to breathe themselves upon thee" (II.iii.255-56). We accept Lafew's invitation to ridicule Parolles and by doing so release our pent up animosity towards Bertram. The King's earlier vehement reaction to Bertram has fueled our hostility towards the Count. In Shakespeare's source, William Painter's The Palace of Pleasure, the King disliked the match: "The King was very loth to graunt him unto her: but for that he had made a promise which he was loth to breake, he caused him to be called forth. . . ."4 In contrast to Painter's King, Shakespeare's expresses no reservations regarding his young physician's request, but briskly confirms her choice: "Why then Young Bertram take her, she's thy wife" (II.iii.105). When Bertram objects, the King further demonstrates his approval of Helena by giving Bertram a long discourse on honor. The King's reprimand, as well as Lafew's sideline praise of Helena, emphasizes Bertram's mistaken pride. And the willingness of the other lords to marry Helena shows us that Bertram alone considers her unworthy. Just as Bertram stands apart from the other characters in

his blindness to Parolles' folly, he stands apart in his blindness to Helena's virtue.

What clearly indict Bertram, however, are his own spiteful words to Helena and the King. The reasons which Bertram gives for refusing Helena are that she is poor and socially beneath him. Bertram has attached himself to an aberrant code of honor, one that places importance in tangible symbols rather than in true virtue. The King explains the fallacy of Bertram's thinking by telling Bertram that material wealth and titles may be easily supplied to match Helena's virtue. This thought, however, repels Bertram, for a fluid system of honor, one susceptible to change by the King's mere word, threatens Bertram's need for stability. Bertram ostensibly submits to the King's command, but his exaggerated praise suggests his disdain for the idea of social mobility: "When I consider / What great creation and what dole of honor / Flies where you bid it . . . " (II.iii.168-70). The compliment hints at Bertram's fear of mutability and death. Just as Bertram refuses to accept Helena's newly acquired honor, he will reject the notion that his own honor can be damaged by irresponsible and immoral actions.

The scene's focus here shifts from Bertram's disparagement of Helena to Lafew's scourge of Bertram's ally in foolishness, Parolles. Parolles is openly chastized twice in the play, now, following his master's cruel treatment of Helena before the King, and more thoroughly in Act IV after Bertram has returned from the chamber of Diana. In both instances, Parolles becomes a whipping-boy

deflecting our hostility from Bertram. We scourge and mock Parolles, so that Bertram might retain our partial good will.

There are elements of self-parody in Lafew's fierce scolding of Parolles. Such self-parody was occasionally used in the moral plays' characterization of the virtues, as for example when in Mankind Mercy's speech is heavily weighted with latinate words. So stuffy and pretentious is Mercy's opening address that Mischief cannot restrain from mocking him: "Leve your chaffe, leve youwr corn, leve your dalicion! Your witt is lityll, your hede is mekyll, ye are full of predicacion."⁵ In All's Well, the stern composure typical of the virtues is exchanged for the feisty temper of Lafew. Lafew's impatience with Parolles, like Mercy's loftiness, sustains the dialectic of good and evil while it questions the dialectic as a simple antithesis of absolutes.

Lafew not only shows a contentious spirit when aroused by folly, but also displays a definite sexual interest, a characteristic never present in a morality virtue. Lafew indeed possesses more true sensual vitality than Parolles, for in Lafew sexual passion and spiritual awareness are joined. Leaving Helena with the King, Lafew laughingly calls himself "Cressid's uncle," that prototype of all future bawds. In the legend of Troilus and Cressida, Pandarus's own sexual needs are vicariously served by the illicit affair of the lovers. Like Pandarus, Lafew is defined by the relationship he arranges. In this case, the relationship culminates in the King's physical and spiritual rejuvenation. The medicine which Helena offers the King bears sexual as well as spiritual implications:

. I have seen a medicine
 That's able to breath life into a stone,
 Quicken a rock, and make you dance canary
 With spritely fire and motion, whose simple touch
 Is powerful to araise King Pippen, nay,
 To give great Charlemain a pen in's hand
 And write to her a love line.

(II.i.72-78)

These lines, so heavily laden with sexual images, suggest the submissive role one must play in order to be healed. Health is not self-induced but comes from the touch of an external agent. Helena plays the masculine role in this act of spiritual intercourse. It is her medicine which can "breath life into a stone," and "Quicken a rock." From this semination, this "simple touch," comes reward. The sexually and spiritually enlivened Charlemain, "pen in's hand," writes to his conqueress a love line. In real terms, Charlemain's love message translates into the King's gift of a husband to Helena. The reciprocity, implied in Lafew's lines and later realized in the King's honor of Helena, reaffirms the system of mutual dependency which was enjoyed in the days of old Rossillion and Narbon. By indicating the assertive role of Helena in regeneration, Lafew also suggests Bertram's reason for rejecting Helena. Bertram fears more than social embarrassment when he exclaims, "But follows it, my lord, to bring me down / Must answer for your raising" (II.iii.112-13). Bertram fears the sexual and spiritual energies of Helena. He fears castration, which is to say death. To Bertram, Helena is the mighty leveller itself, who both dissolves social distinctions and cuts off the individual's vital potency. As we see in the King's return to health,

however, submission may bring new life. As Lafew's pandering between the King and Helena promises spiritual and sexual restoration, so too it reflects the blending of sexual and spiritual elements in his own character.

The same mixture of passion and honor that we find in Lafew, we also see in Helena. It is in fact the precarious balance of daring and modesty in her character which first draws us to her cause. As she speaks with Parolles in the opening scene, we watch her struggle between resignation to her fate and a desire to assert her will. Just as Parolles counsels Bertram to betray his honor, so too Parolles encourages Helena to lose that cold companion virginity. Parolles serves, as James L. Calderwood explains, as a catalyst for Helena's natural impulses.⁶ Following her dialogue with Parolles, Helena resolves to follow an active course in loving Bertram. The knave's influence over Helena, however, stops here, for while both speak of the loss of virginity, it implies to each a different moral condition and goal. To Parolles it means sexual license. But to Helena it means commitment, about which Parolles knows nothing whatsoever. He eagerly betrays Bertram to his "Russian" captors for a chance of saving his own life. Helena, on the other hand, risks life and reputation so that she might lose her virginity to her own liking. Helena's love for Bertram is also placed in relief by the jester Lavatch. Parolles and Lavatch complement each other as comical figures of vice and death, Parolles representing death by presumption and Lavatch death by despair. While Parolles survives by hypocrisy, flattery and concealment, Lavatch lives by shattering all illusions.

Honor, nobility, and love are merely pretenses for serving one's physical urges. For Lavatch, marriage is not more than institutionalized lechery. Asked why he would marry, Lavatch explains, "My poor body, madam, requires it. I am driven on by the flesh, and he must needs go that the devil drives" (I.iii.28-30). As Lavatch's desire for marriage parallels Helena's, it draws attention to her sexual motivations. The fool's mirror that would reduce her love to physical desire proves inadequate when Lavatch loses interest in Isbel: "Our old ling and our Isbel's a' th' country are nothing like your old ling and your Isbels a' th' court" (III.ii.12-14). Helena's love for Bertram, unlike Lavatch's love for Isbel is enduring, and this devotion suggests a dimension of her love which Lavatch can never realize or reflect.

Helena does not abandon modesty when she opts for pursuing Bertram but brings together humility and ambition. At the close of her exchange with Parolles, she describes the complexity of her love.

There shall your master have a thousand loves,
 A mother, and a mistress, and a friend,
 A phoenix, captain, and an enemy,
 A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign,
 A counsellor, a traitress, and a dear;
 His humble ambition, and his discord dulcet;
 His faith, his sweet disaster. . . .

(I.ii.165-73)

Some critics view Helena's sexual desires as unwholesome. Calderwood, for example, says that although Shakespeare does not perceive sex in itself as impure, "Helena's sexual desire is 'impure' in terms of the ideal of courtly love which she has been professing to follow."⁷

While it is true that Helena combines innocence and passion, modesty and daring, it does not follow that Helena is hypocritical. Her nature, like her love for Bertram, is paradoxical. When selecting a husband, Helena demonstrates how passion and boldness may be tempered by gentleness and modesty: "I dare not say I take you, but I give my service ever whilst I live, / Into your guiding power"

(II.iii.102-04). The two contrasting actions "taking" (her selection of Bertram) and "giving" (her devotion to him) unite in Helena's address. Her words are not those of a brazen opportunist, but of a woman who believes that she has passed the essential test proving her worthy of Bertram's love. Helena gives a further demonstration of humility when Bertram objects to their marriage. She implores the King to dismiss the matter: "That you are well restor'd, my lord, I'm glad. / Let the rest go" (II.iii.147-48).

Rather than tainting Helena's character, passion and assertiveness are essential ingredients for restoring Bertram and France. In Much Ado, Hero, who is submissive in every way, undergoes a symbolic death for Claudio and brings him to repentance. Such passivity is not sufficient, however, to restore the darker world of the tragicomedies. Unlike Claudio, Bertram is fooled by the villain from the play's beginning. He speaks with Parolles of running away to war before he meets Helena at court. An active and aggressive virtue is needed to shake Bertram from his folly. Without Helena's boldness and humility neither the King's restoration nor Bertram's salvation would be possible. For both acts require that Helena be willing to risk self-loss. It is Helena's paradoxical nature that enables her to

unlock the riddles of death, both of the King's illness and of Bertram's impossible tasks. Riddles evoke a sense of origins, of the archaic past and of the internal world of dreams. For like the primal words of ancient languages and the images of our dreams, riddles often disregard negation and join opposites.⁸ To solve a riddle, we must link antithetical ideas to form a harmonious if paradoxical whole. The answerer risks self-dissolution as ordinary structures and familiar meanings are abandoned. These risks often find objective expression in folk tales by the sentence of death, the loss of riches, or banishment should the hero or heroine's efforts fail. To solve the engima of the King's disease, Helena ventures "Tax of impudence, / A strumpet's boldness, a divulged shame," "vildest tortues" (II.i.170-71), and death. All the qualities that define Helena, honor, virginity, and life, she relinquishes to save the King and to win Bertram. The mixture of passion and devotion also enables Helena to conceive the morally ambiguous bed-trick: it is both "wicked meaning in a lawful deed, / And lawful meaning in a lawful act, / Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact" (III.vii.45-47). The bed-trick, harshly condemned by so many critics, symbolizes the paradox underlying regeneration. It marks the nadir of Bertram's fall, "the sinful fact," and represents the sacrifice that makes regeneration possible, "a lawful act."

When Bertram returns from Diana's chamber, he reels with hubris. Greeting the French lords, Bertram hurriedly ticks off the activities of the night. Included in his busy evening has been the burial and mourning of a wife:

I have to-night dispatch'd sixteen businesses, a month's length a-piece, by an abstract of success: I have congied with the Duke, done my adieu with his nearest; buried a wife, mourn'd for her, writ to my lady mother I am returning, entertain'd my convoy, and between these main parcels of dispatch effected many nicer needs.

(IV.iii.85-91)

Whatever had stung Bertram's nature upon reading his mother's letter, seeming to change him almost into another man, does not concern him now. Even the knowledge of Helena's death does not dampen his high spirits. Bertram has just seduced a beautiful woman, has received military honors and has learned that he may return home. At the moment when he feels most triumphant, however, he is most self-deluded and vulnerable. We know from the French lords that Bertram's achievements in battle "shall at home be encount'red with a shame as ample" (IV.iii.69-70). And we realize as well that Parolles is at this very second waiting in the stocks to humiliate Bertram.

Two events contribute to Bertram's recovery: the exposure of Parolles and the return of Helena to Rossillion. In both cases, illusions are dispelled. The capture and interrogation of Parolles by the "Muscovites" reveals the emptiness of Bertram's friend. Parolles, who seemed to Bertram so clever and brave, is proven irredeemably mortal and a not very effective mortal at that. Like all vices, Parolles clings desperately to life. He will gladly betray the Florentine army and Bertram as well so that he may live. To Parolles, any disgrace is preferable to death: "Let me live, sir, in a dungeon, i' th' stocks, or any where, so I may live" (IV.iii.243-45). The

French lords laugh at Parolles's ingenious slanders, for they have expected nothing more from the rogue. To them, as to us, Parolles presents no threat. Bertram cannot laugh, however, for he is closely allied to the fool. So astonished is the young Count by Parolles' confession that all he can do is reiterate bitterly: "a cat" (IV.iii.237-38,264,275). Bertram suffers even more intensely than Parolles, for Parolles has always known himself a coward. Because his heart is not great, Parolles rallies his spirits and follows the lords.

While Parolles is exposed as a hollow, laughable figure, the very skull of death, Helena in the play's final scene becomes the giver of life. Before Helena's appearance at Rossillion, Bertram entraps himself as thoroughly as had Parolles when interrogated by the "Muscovites." Spotting Helena's ring on Bertram's finger, the King asks Bertram to explain. Bertram's frustration and confusion during this scene are unlike anything that he has yet experienced. Even his dismay over Parolles' confession does not compare with his perplexity concerning the ring. As Bertram participated in the discrediting of Parolles he was accompanied and supported by the French lords. Now he stands alone as he tries to extricate himself from his own lies. For the first time, Bertram experiences a true sense of isolation and limitation. The night of illicit love that seemed originally for Bertram an exhilarating moment of power, now becomes the severest lesson of mortality. Helena's appearance and her proof that it was she and not Diana who bedded Bertram make possible Bertram's restoration. Diana introduces Helena as the meaning to the riddle:

Dead though she be, she feels her young one kick.
 So there's my riddle: one that's dead is quick--
 And now behold the meaning.

(V.iii.302-04)

Helena provides the key to joining antitheses, youth with age (Bertram and the King), male with female (Bertram and Helena and Diana and her choice of a husband), and death with life (Helena's own death in sexual intercourse and the conception of her child and the old Bertram and the new one). But Helena herself comes as "the shadow of a wife. . . . / The name and not the thing" (V.iii.307). Regeneration depends on mutual dependence. Bertram must give Helena a new identity as his wife as she offers him a new identity as her husband. This obligation Bertram now seems ready to accept. The King's closing lines, "All yet seems well, and if it end so meet / The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet" (V.iii.333-34; emphasis mine) suggests his less than confident belief that all is well. We, like the King, hope that Bertram will keep his vow to love Helena, "ever, ever dearly" (V.iii.316). That Helena can be happy with a less than perfect Bertram she has already proven. She does not expect perfection. Preparing to return to Rossillion, Helena voices her hopes: "But with the word and time will bring on summer, / When briers shall have leaves as well as thorns, / And be as sweet as sharp?" (IV.iii.31-34). Helena knows that she lives in the world of experience, where summer brings a sweetness never fully free of pain. Leaves and thorns simultaneously adorn the briar. And as life and death mingle in nature so too do they interweave in human

experience. Without death (and its spiritual equivalents, disillusionment and grief) regeneration is impossible. The emphasis on mutability (the changing seasons) and on the riddle or paradox of nature (leaves and thorns) in Helena's words suggests that though earthly joy is not eternal, the summers of requited love are well worth the anguish of winter's discontent.

Notes

¹Jeremy Taylor, The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying in English Prose: 1600-1660, ed. Victor Harris and Itrat Husain (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), p. 491.

²Gray, pp. 118, 206-207.

³Charlotte Spivack, p. 84.

⁴William Painter, The Palace of Pleasure in ed. Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources, Vol. II, p. 391.

⁵Mankind in ed. Bevington, Medieval Drama, p. 904.

⁶James L. Calderwood, "The Mingled Yarn of All's Well," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 62 (1963), 63.

⁷Calderwood, p. 69.

⁸Sigmund Freud, "The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words" in Collected Papers, IV, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959), p. 185. In his review of a pamphlet (published in 1884) by the philologist Karl Abel, Freud discusses the similarity of antithetical words to dream work. In dreams, explains Freud, contradictory terms or concepts are often held simultaneously, posing no conflict for the dreamer. Freud concludes, "Our conceptions arise through comparison. 'Were it always light we should not distinguish between light and dark, and accordingly could not have either the conception of, nor the word for, light. . . . Man has not been able to acquire even his oldest and simplest conceptions otherwise than in contrast with their opposite; he only gradually learnt to separate the two sides of the antithesis and think of the one without conscious comparison with the other'." Freud does not deal in this work with the association between riddles and dreams.

CHAPTER VI
"I SWEAR I WILL NOT DIE TO-DAY FOR ANY MAN'S PERSUASION":
MORTAL REFLECTIONS IN MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Measure for Measure, like All's Well, uses the comedy of Vice to suggest evil's final defeat. The picture that Isabella presents Angelo of his pride and arrogance emphasizes the absurdity of humanity when it forgets its mortal nature:

. but man, proud man
Dress'd in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd
(His glassy essence), like an angry ape
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal.

(II.ii.117-23; emphasis mine)

From the distant perspective of the angels, proud man appears not threatening, but pitiable and laughable. He is fantastically apish, grotesquely blind and impotent. The audience, like Isabella's angels, attains an elevated vantage point which allows a dual perspective on the play's action. We feel, on the one hand, the sinister reality of Vienna's decadence and Angelo's abandonment to lust and tyranny, while on the other, we sense a larger cosmic plan that dwarfs evil, making it seem more foolish than dangerous. As playgoers we may possess the heightened observation point of the angels, but we do not possess their purity of reason. We relate to characters and events with the

emotional complexity of finite beings. We are thus hybrid creatures--angels with spleens--and so we laugh to defend ourselves, at least temporarily, against death. Isabella's final words, "laugh mortal," emphasize the unique relationship between humor and death. Laughter in the renaissance was considered a distinguishing feature of human beings, helping them to reconcile the contradictions of their nature, their inescapable mortality and their potential for immortality.¹ In Measure for Measure, laughter functions similarly. It both moderates our apprehension of Claudio's coming death and moves us to sympathy. Our compassion for Claudio, who is paralyzed by his fear of death, like that of Isabella, Mariana, and Duke Vincentio, then serves as a catalyst for new beginnings. After all, it is we who must accept the play's resolution and close the comic circle. The humorous subplot, along with our knowledge of Duke Vincentio's secret presence in Vienna, helps us to recognize the comic potential inherent in the play's bitter conflict. Characters such as Lucio, Mistress Overdone, Pompey, and Barnardine enhance our sense of humanity's fatuity by providing a comical shadow play of the central complication. Images of disease, decay, imprisonment and death surrounding these figures emphasize our inescapable mortality while their self-important posturings and blunders remind us of the burlesque figures we become when we try to assume a nature not our own.

The comic bawds and knaves are, like Parolles, progeny of the medieval Vice. They are, however, farther removed from their forebearers than he. They are not confidants of the hero, encouraging and tempting him to evil. Indeed only low characters, such as Mr.

Froth, fall prey to their mischief. The comic villains of Measure for Measure are less important for the havoc they wreak than for the associations of disease that expand from them to the city at large and to Angelo when he falls to lechery. Yet while supplying a decadent context for the main action, the merry rogues also allow us a safe distance from which to see the terrors of evil and death. There is much free-spirited gaiety in their humor. Thus, as we enter into their circle of play, contempt merges with a more humane and compassionate laughter. We indulge the scurrilous rascals as we would highspirited and stubborn children. Our tolerance then extends to include Angelo, Claudio, and Isabella as well, for they too are often like children, selfish and unbridled. While the serious characters are more dangerous than the clowns, they have a capacity for change that the clowns do not. It is, after all, the nature of clowns to remain perpetual children. We thus give the non-clowns the reins, hoping that self-inflicted pain will bring them to maturity. Through the sense of well-being and of freedom that laughter affords, we gather confidence that Claudio may escape death. Since his death-sentence mirrors the precarious state of Vienna's spiritual life, Claudio's release must come through spiritual growth--not only his own, but also that of Angelo and Isabella.

When instating Angelo, the Duke reminds him that goodness must be measured in terms of its outward contribution: "Heaven doth with us as we with torches do, / Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues / Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike / As if we had them not" (I.i.32-35). With this lesson in mind, we watch the activities

on the public street, evaluating Angelo as we measure the effects of his resolve to purge Vienna. Like a Hogarth etching, overflowing with bawds and knaves, the public street scene points a satiric finger both at the depraved populace and at the severe justice. We sense the moral chasm separating Angelo from his subjects, a hiatus with austerity on the one side and license on the other. Each extreme, however, ironically calls forth its opposite. License necessitates restraint while authoritarianism gives way to anarchy. The jests of Lucio and his sordid companions bring vividly to mind the natural penalties of concupiscence. Mouth lesions, hollow bones, and sciatica are the debilitating consequences of lechery. We are not too concerned with the lecherous gentlemen at first, but when Pompey and Mistress Overdone, two notorious bawds, join the knaves, we begin to sense the pervasiveness of the city's corruption. Disease does not merely cause physical affliction of the few; it is a spiritual disorder threatening an entire society.

The street scene not only satirizes the city's license, but also provides a mocking picture of Angelo's severity. Just as laxity inevitably brings confinement, austerity breeds corruption. While Angelo attempts to administer justice by a rigid and impersonal adherence to law, he effects the grossest inequities. He sentences Claudio to death and labels him a "lecher," while bawds, prostitutes and their customers walk the street in perfect freedom. Angelo would mold the city into a likeness of himself. He would make it mirror what he incorrectly conceives to be his own perfection. Ironically, the city does reflect Angelo, but it reflects the true one. By its

own resistance to suppression, the city foreshadows the eruption of passion in the rigid governor. So rampant and resilient is Vienna's underworld that Angelo's edict causes little alarm. The brothels will not be destroyed because of the edict, for a foresighted burgher has purchased them, presumably to reopen them when the Duke returns. The houses, Pompey explains, "will stand for seed" (I.ii.99). As we contrast Claudio's grim expectations with the buoyant confidence of the bawds, Claudio's reference to heaven's dictum, "on whom it will it will; / On whom it will not, so; yet still 'tis just" (I.ii.122-23) resounds with ironic reverberations. The "demigod, Authority" (I.ii.120) seems to Claudio, and to us, aloof and threatening, but hardly just. After his brief appearance in the opening scene, Angelo does not appear again in Act I. His absence for so long a period contributes to our sense of his isolation. When Angelo finally does appear in Act II, scene i, it is significantly in the court of justice where he is defending his judgment of Claudio.

Here, Escalus brings to Angelo's attention the relation between self-knowledge and justice, pleading with Angelo to compare himself to the man he has sentenced to die; "Whether you had not sometime in your life / Err'd in this point which now you censure him" (II.i.14-15). Implied in Escalus' statement are two related questions: first, are you guilty of sin, and second, if you are, should you then be merciful? Angelo neither admits nor denies his own sinfulness, claiming that his own merit has no relevance to the dispensing of justice. The civil statutes, in Angelo's view, are not subject to interpretation. They are immutable and binding and thus bear no

connection with the soul of their administrator. A guilty man should not be pardoned, says Angelo, because his judge has similar faults, but rather the guilty judge too should suffer the prescribed penalty: "When I, that censure him, do so offend, / Let mine own judgment pattern out my death, / And nothing come in partial . . . " (II.i.29-31). Unlike Escalus, Angelo thinks only in terms of absolutes. The fact that Claudio had a noble father and was bound to Julietta by "a true contract" (I.ii.145) does not in Angelo's view mitigate the sinfulness of his deed. Claudio has broken the letter of the law and must suffer the prescribed penalty.

Just as Angelo's theoretical arguments seem to seal the fate of Claudio, the clowns enter to remind us that theory and reality often runs at odds. When Pompey, Elbow, and Froth confound Angelo, we delight in the magistrate's confusion just as we exalt in Escalus' competent handling of the fools. The clowns thus undermine the power of Angelo, restoring our hope that Angelo's tyranny may soon end and that Claudio may be saved. Elbow, a constable in the vein of Dogberry, enters the hall, leading Pompey and Mr. Froth in custody. The burlesque confrontation that ensues, by separating the weightier scenes of appeal (that of Escalus and that of Isabella), allows us a playful respite. The scene casts its comic light in three directions: to the past offense of Claudio, to the future fall of Angelo, and to the present vulnerability of the audience. The sexual transgression of Mr. Froth suggests that of Claudio. Thus the magic that envelops fools, protecting them from harsh reality, shelters by association the notably serious Claudio. Clowns are protected,

explains Richard Levin, by their ability to suggest the qualities of a child: "Like the child, the clown is dependent upon an indulgent providence or paternal figure to protect him from doing or suffering any serious harm. And in the same way he also seems to place himself under the protection of the audience, which is one reason why we acquiesce in his escapades and his escape from punishment.² Elbow is particularly important in this scene, for he bears none of the dark associations of the other comic characters. He indeed seems an innocent child, ill at ease in the adult world of language, corruption, and death. What makes Elbow most endearing is the ease with which he is placated by a small token of approval and understanding. Taken aside and told that Pompey and Froth are to be released for further observation, Elbow thanks Escalus heartily: "Marry, I thank your worship for it. Thou seest, thou wicked varlet, now what's come upon thee. Thou art to continue now, thou varlet, thou art to continue" (II.i.189-92). The laughter that surrounds the clowns allows us to accept along with Elbow the release of the villains. And this laughter also places in a less sinister light the death sentence that hangs over Claudio.

While the sexual act of Froth shadows Claudio's, it also foreshadows Angelo's. The seduction of Elbow's "respected" wife presages Angelo's attempt to corrupt the innocent maid Isabella. Froth thus provides a comic mirror of the dark potentialities existing in Angelo. But just as Angelo refused to see in Claudio any resemblance to himself, he fails to see his reflection in the fool's bauble. Impatient with Elbow's mistakings and with Pompey's evasions,

Angelo hands the dispute over to Escalus and leaves the room. The inquiry, Angelo complains, "will last out a night in Russia" (II.i.134). The morass of human affairs proves too murky for the doctrinaire judge. Had Angelo stayed he would undoubtedly have been thrown into greater agitation by Pompey's casual reference to the futility of the government's present course: "Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city? . . . Truly, sir, in my poor opinion, they will to't then" (II.i.230-31). Pompey is as confident in lechery's resilience as Angelo is in its abolition. The truth, the play suggests, lies between the two views. Lechery may be controlled by the ruler's understanding of himself and his people but cannot be fully expelled. To insist that it can is to deny the implications of the word "mortality." By his arduous efforts to render Elbow intelligible and to force directness from Pompey, Escalus reveals the importance of personal involvement, careful scrutiny, and great patience in dispensing justice. Unlike Escalus, however, Angelo refuses to descend from his Olympian heights, to know his people and himself. He prefers isolation, precision, and abstraction, for these allow him to deny his kinship with death.

As the clowns parody the action of the main plot, they also hold their fool's mirror before us and inquire, "Who is the fool?". Our laughter, which is more free-spirited than contemptuous, arises because the clowns have touched the child in us. This identification forces us to see other similarities between these very mortal, self-absorbed creatures and ourselves. Unlike Angelo, we are not free to leave and re-enter the drama at a more propitious moment. Nor do we

wish to, for the catoptric powers of the fool are more fascinating and enjoyable than disturbing. Identification brings tolerance and a release of mounting tensions, enabling us to endure once more the cold and un pitying arguments of Angelo.

The comic reflection that the clowns provide is rejected by Angelo for the mirror of vanity. In the following scene, Isabella alludes to the false reflection that Angelo accepts. Although many annotators of Isabella's "angry ape" rebuke render the phrase "His glassy essence" to mean "his soul, which is reflected from God,"³ it probably had another meaning for the renaissance. The "glassy essence" of which proud man is simultaneously "most ignorant" and "most proud" is "the identity reflected both in and by his pride, and his pride in turn . . . is the reflection of himself in the image likeness of authoritarian deity."⁴ The ape and its looking glass in renaissance iconography and narrative was generally symbolic of vanity. An anonymous German poem, for example, tells the story of "an ape who looks at his reflection with pride and pleasure until he finds out that his counterpart in the mirror is not real, whereupon he flies into a rage and breaks the mirror."⁵ The looking glass deceives its viewer, for it seems to fix and stabilize the reflected image. The face that is encircled by the frame, becomes endowed, like a portrait or a photograph, with a timeless quality. As renaissance satirists and religious writers never tire of reminding us, however, images that seem certain, such as youth, beauty and authority, are in truth ephemeral. The fragility of the glass suggests the unreliability of its image. The looking glass is a suitable image for Angelo, for he

too is brittle and highly susceptible to breakage. To soften Angelo, Isabella pleads, as Escalus before her, that Angelo search within himself for the common bond linking him with humanity: "Go to your bosom, / Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know / That's like my brother's fault" (II.ii.136-38). Isabella holds before Angelo a mirror of mortality. Proud man, she explains, is dressed "in a little brief authority" (II.ii.118), and though he tries to thunder as the gods, he cannot alter his nature any more than can an ape. Isabella's words suggest that death and not life provides our true reflection, for it alone refuses to flatter but tells us who we are. A popular medieval legend called the Three Living and the Three Dead drives home this truth. According to the legend, three young kings are walking in the forest when they suddenly come upon three hideous forms, skeletons or corpses, which wear tattered shrouds and are infested with worms. The kings are shocked to see their own reflections in the ghoulish figures before them. Strengthening this identification, the dead issue a stern warning: "Kinges three, Be warned by me: As ye are, so were we: As we are, so shall ye be" (emphasis mine) (Figs. 6-7).⁶ The chiastic "ye" and "me" emphasize the mirrorlike quality of the dead. Like the three dead presenting to the living an image of their deaths, Isabella holds before Angelo a mirror of his self-deception and mortality. The image that Isabella wishes Angelo to recognize, however, is not one he will accept. Angelo sees in Isabella's piety and goodness the absolute virtue that he esteems in himself. Angelo's passion for Isabella, like that of Narcissus for the beautiful boy in the water, feeds on self-love. As



Fig. 6. The Three Living and the Three Dead, a detail from a fresco in the Camposanto, Pisa (c. 1350)

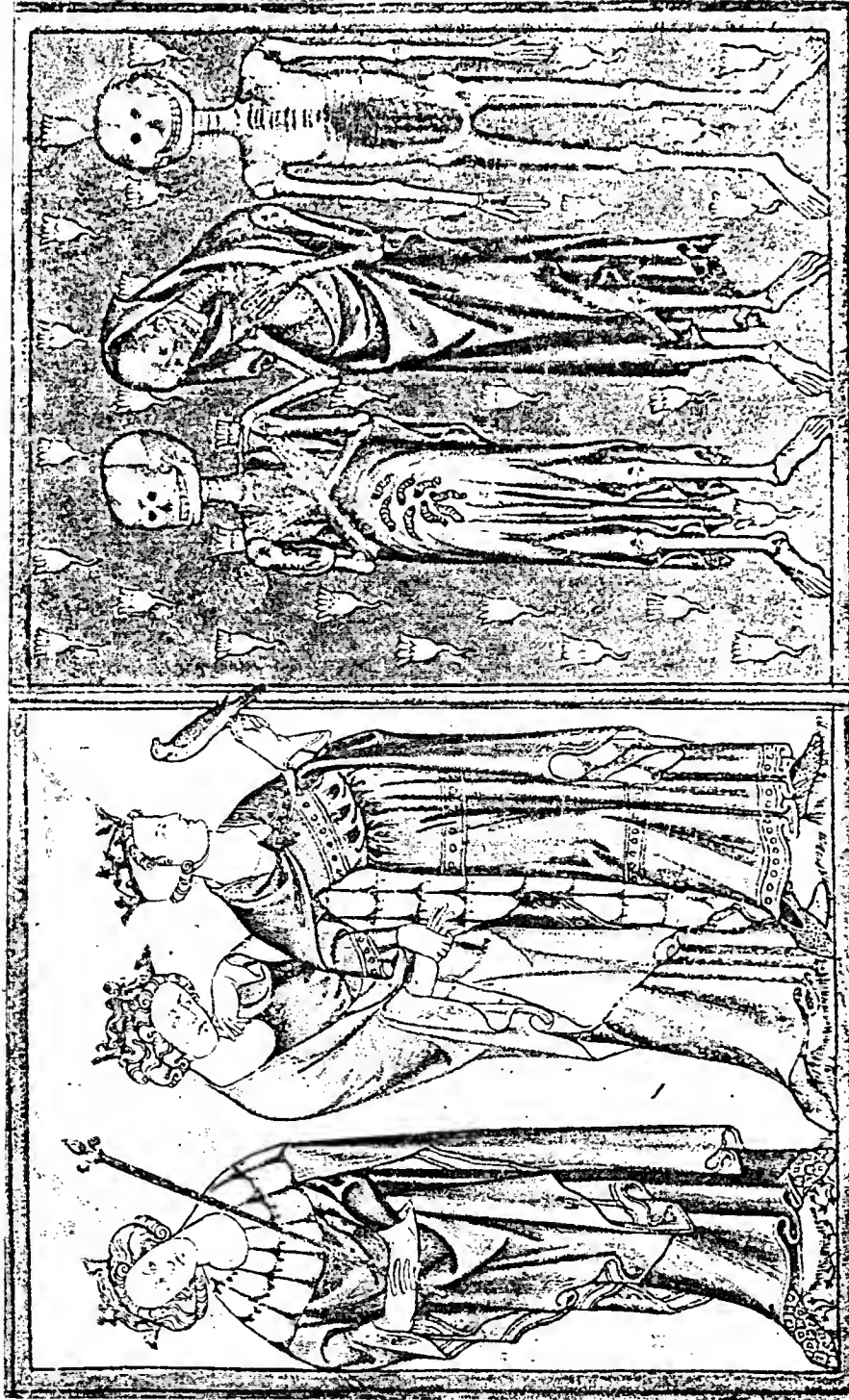


Fig. 7. The Three Living and the Three Dead, from the Psalter of Robert de Lisle (end of first quarter, 14th century)

Isabella speaks, Angelo feels the first stirrings of passion: "She speaks, and 'tis / Such sense that my sense breed with it" (II.ii.142-43). Angelo's passion leads him not to self-knowledge and sympathy for Claudio, but to corruption: " . . . but it is I / That, lying by the violet in the sun, / Do as the carrion does, not as the flow'r, / Corrupt with virtuous season" (II.ii.164-167). Images of death and sterility (be-heading, hanging, gelding, and spaying), formerly associated with Angelo, now combine with those of death's putrefaction.

The ape of the German poem, realizing the falsity of the mirror, shatters the glass and symbolically annihilates itself. Just so, Angelo, sensing the falseness of his virtue, attempts to shatter his reflection in Isabella. His corruption of Isabella will end all delusions of innocence; he will be as perfectly evil as he thought himself perfectly good. The diabolic, like the angelic, holds for Angelo the illusion of immortality. Even in his surrender to evil, Angelo must be extraordinary. He must remain apart from the rest of humanity. His name suggests this isolation. Before he meets Isabella, it underscores his exemplary but icy "goodness"; afterwards, it becomes a mocking reminder of what he once was and now has become. Like the fallen Lucifer, whose name signifies his former affinity to light, Angelo must bear the scorn and ridicule of his name. "Good Angel" when written on the "devil's horn" (II.iv.16) torments and scourges the hypocrite.

It is not surprising that Angelo would see his own likeness in Isabella, for righteousness and piety are her most conspicuous

features. The similarities between the magistrate and the novice are notable in the opening act. The juxtaposition of the Duke's description of Angelo as one who "scarce confesses / That his blood flows" (I.iii.51-52) with the picture of Isabella in the nunnery, wishing "a more strict restraint / Upon the sisterhood" (I.iv.4-5) emphasizes their mutual commitment to asceticism. Our previous observations of the public street left us keenly aware of the dangers of self-denial. We are thus concerned for the young woman who desires these rigid restraints. The rules of the nunnery are already exceedingly strict. Francisca's startled response to the voice of Lucio and her explicit reference to rules regarding men suggest an unacknowledged fear underlying the convent's serenity. The cloister provides not only a devotional home but also a retreat from worldly temptation and commitment, an escape from the heightened experience of sexual intercourse which is figuratively death and literally life. Lucio's greeting to Isabella, "Hail, virgin, if you be, as those cheek-roses / Proclaim you are no less" (I.iv.16-17) suggests the sublimated passion of nuns in general and of Isabella in specific. Lucio not only questions the professed chastity of the sisters in his equivocal salute, "Hail, virgin, if you be," he notes in Isabella the passion of a young woman who has not yet known a lover, "those cheek-roses / Proclaim you are no less." Lucio's sexual references in this scene place in a satiric light what to Lucio must seem the nunnery's moribund atmosphere and Isabella's severity. Lucio indeed clashes with Isabella and her surroundings as violently as did Pompey with Angelo and the Court. As Lucio and Pompey represent vice they point

to lechery's relation, death; as they are earthy, vital creatures, however, they place in relief artificial restraint, while pointing to its affinity with death. Though he denies it, Lucio would seem the lapwing, playing and jesting with the beautiful novice. Isabella, however, offended by his license accuses him of blasphemy and scolds him for his impertinance. Trying to win Isabella's approval, Lucio proceeds to describe Julietta's condition in ornate, formal language:

Your brother and his lover have embrac'd,
 As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time
 That from the seedness the bare fallow brings
 To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb
 Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.

(I.iv.40-44)

Though Lucio attempts to mend his language, his copious description filled with images of sexual intercourse and fetal growth underscore, as surely as did his earlier jest, the sterility of Isabella's world. The convent in Shakespeare's comedies is typically regarded as a suspended existence, a kind of living death. Theseus in Midsummer stresses the shrouded and somnambulistic quality of a nun's life when warning Helena to obey her father: "For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd, / To live a barren sister all your life, / Chaunting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon" (I.i.71-73). Even when the nunnery functions as a refuge, as in The Comedy of Errors and Much Ado, it is no less a place of sorrow. In both works, escape from such a life symbolizes resurrection. And as in these comedies, so too in Measure for Measure, the convent seems severe and sterile, an unfitting place for beautiful young Isabella.

The peril that hangs over Claudio ironically saves Isabella from a fate almost as tragic as would be his death. Lucio, a most worldly creature, is appropriately the one who draws Isabella from the cloister. Like Parolles' effect on Helena when she is torn between passivity and action (Act I, scene i), Lucio serves as a catalyst for Isabella's involvement. Ironically, Lucio is the one who first challenges her to faith and humility. When she hesitates to leave the convent, "My power? Alas, I doubt --," Lucio chides her, "Our doubts are traitors, / And makes us lose the good we oft might win, / By fearing to attempt" (I.iv.77-79). Then in Act II, scene ii, Lucio induces her to kneel: "Kneel down before him [Angelo], hang upon his gown; / You are too cold . . . " (44-45). Although Lucio would have Isabella grovel obsequiously before the magistrate, he is nonetheless right when he calls her "too cold." Isabella finds it exceedingly difficult to beg for her brother's life, for his vice is one that she "abhors / And most desires should meet the blow of justice" (II.ii.29-30). Even when Isabella finally launches into her petition, she displays few signs of humility. She sermonizes vehemently but shows little of the human warmth of which she speaks. As she is about to leave, Isabella offers Angelo a bribe. Misunderstanding, Lucio responds enthusiastically to the idea: "You had marr'd all else" (II.ii.48). Lucio's words not only betray his own shamelessness, but also cast a satiric light on Isabella's etherial propensities. Her bribe consists of "true prayers, / That shall be up at heaven, and enter there / . . . from fasting maids, whose minds are dedicated / To nothing temporal" (II.ii.151-54). Though Isabella has left the

seclusion of the convent, her closing remarks remind us that her real affection lies in things celestial.

Although Isabella becomes Angelo's antagonist in the following acts, she continues to mirror Angelo's absolutism. Act II, scene iv reinforces our sense of antithesis and reflection by means of structure. Like a mirror the scene is chiastic, beginning with a soliloquy by Angelo who commits himself to a course of hypocrisy and tyranny ("Blood, thou art blood" (15)) and ending with a soliloquy by Isabella who just as vehemently devotes herself to an opposing course ("Then, Isabel, live chaste, and brother, die; / More than our brother is our chastity" (184-85)). What comes between the two soliloquies is a debate between piety and apostasy. Isabella again uses the looking glass as a symbol of vanity. This time, however, the mirror represents woman's frailty:

Angelo. Nay, women are frail too.
 Isabella. Ay, as the glasses where they view
 themselves,
 Which are as easy broke as they make forms.
 Women? Help heaven! men their creation mar
 In profiting by them. Nay, call us ten times frail,
 For we are soft as our complexions are,
 And credulous to false prints.

(II.iv.124-29)

License results, as Isabella knows, not in regeneration but in perpetuation of an initial emptiness. Illegitimate births are but "broken forms" and "false prints." Though acutely aware of the destruction that comes from lack of discipline, Isabella fails to see that strength itself can be a weakness. Her cry, "Help heaven" and her command "Nay, call us ten times frail" reveal her revulsion at the

idea of sexual weakness. Isabella's own sensuality has not been suffocated by self-denial, however, but merely redirected. It is channeled not towards life but towards death: "Were I under the terms of death, / Th' impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies, / And strip myself to death, as to a bed / That longing have been sick for . . . " (II.iv.101-03). The sensual quality of Isabella's description suggests not only a repression of sexual desire, but also a falsification of death itself. By translating the idea of her death into a poetic metaphor, Isabella renders it abstract and harmless. She perceives her death not as a common bond between herself and others, but as extraordinary. Her death would be that of a martyr. Just as her last meeting with Angelo emphasizes his isolation, this one underscores Isabella's. It is she who stands alone at the scene's end, defiant and proud.

Isabella is not necessarily wrong in rejecting Angelo's unholy bargain. Isabella has every reason to be outraged by Angelo's breach of ethics. Still, many theologians including Saint Augustine are inclined to agree with Claudio: "What sin you do to save a brother's life, / Nature dispenses with the deed so far, / That it becomes a virtue" (III.i.133-34).⁷ What casts an even more dubious light upon her anger is her readiness to sacrifice her brother for her chastity. She stills her conscience by claiming that her brother would never agree to so base a redemption. Her exaggerated certainty, however, suggests that it is she, rather than Claudio, who would prefer him yield up "twenty heads. . . . / On twenty bloody blocks . . . / Before his sister should her body stoop / To such abhorr'd

pollution" (II.iv.180-83). The self-delusion underlying this display of confidence becomes apparent in the following act when Isabella confronts her brother with Angelo's offer: "Oh I do fear thee, Claudio, and I quake, / Lest thou a feverous life shouldst entertain, / And six or seven winters more respect / Than a perpetual honor" (II.i.73-74). Isabella is not in the least confident of Claudio's resolve. Her earlier allusion to his eagerness to die for her is merely a projection of her own intense desire.

We sense Isabella's aloofness and absolutism in the first two acts, but our sympathy for her as a victim outweighs any scruples concerning her coldness. It is not until we see Isabella vent her anger on Claudio in Act III that we realize how destructive her self-righteousness can be:

Take my defiance!
Die, perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee.

(III.i.142-46)

Isabella's reference to kneeling, "might but my bending down," underscores her pride, for the gesture of humility and faith that Lucio previously coached her in, she now disdains. Her mention of "a thousand prayers" may remind us of the numerous monastic masses held for the dead or dying.⁸ Isabella, however, transforms the traditional intercessory prayer for life into a curse for death. Her "thousand prayers" are not to assure Claudio's mortal or spiritual salvation but his death and annihilation. The exclamation, "perish!" connotes

finality, the death of the soul. With these words, Isabella leaves Claudio and refuses to answer his plea that she return. It is Claudio, not Isabella, who now seems most abused. Although he has fallen victim to the very fear that Duke Vincentio warned him against before Isabella's arrival, his fear is all too human. We recognize in his apprehension of the unknown our own anxiety about death and respond compassionately. Claudio deserves a firm and patient response rather than the explosive one his sister gives. Isabella, however, cannot bear Claudio's weakness any more than she can bear thinking of her own. In her eyes, Claudio must be either the perfect image of her father, "there my father's grave / Did utter forth a voice" (III.i.85-86), or else a bastard, "a warped slip of wilderness" (141). For Isabella, death has lost its religious significance. Her father's grave that should remind her of her own mortality becomes a manipulative device for persuading Claudio that her chastity is more important than his life.

Claudio, however, is neither as noble nor as base as Isabella contends. In the opening street scene, Claudio displays a mixture of love and pride. Unlike Angelo and Isabella, Claudio has made a commitment to love. He has entered into an espousal de presenti that lacks only the formal ceremony to make his marriage licit in the eyes of Angelo. But although Claudio loves Julietta, he is nonetheless guilty in having entered into a sexual relationship with her before the public bans. His violation of the law suggests his disdain for external authority. And this dislike feeds his resentment now that he has been sentenced to die:

Thus can the demigod, Authority,
 Make us pay down for our offense by weight
 The words of heaven: on whom it will, it will;
 On whom it will not, so; yet still 'tis just.

(I.ii.120-23)

Although Claudio's sarcasm is directed towards Angelo, his words reflect a more generalized and deeply entrenched resentment.

Claudio's use of a biblical quotation to mock the justice of Angelo suggests his defiance not only of Angelo but also of God. Claudio's refusal to accept any real responsibility for his actions reflects his presumption. He admits his immoderation but bitterly resents the imposition of the law: "Our natures do pursue, / Like rats that ravin down their proper bane, / A thirsty evil, and when we drink we die" (I.ii.128-30). Claudio's metaphor of a rat's ravenous appetite to describe his passion for Julietta is as revealing as it is grotesque, for Claudio feels himself betrayed by both his passions and a sudden unleashing of the law.

Because signs of Claudio's willfulness appear in the opening act, the Duke's lengthy confession of Claudio in Act III, strikes us as desirable. The Duke's lesson on mortality is not unduly harsh but is a message whose aim is to bring Claudio to self-knowledge: "Be absolute for death," the "Friar" explains, "either death or life / Shall thereby be the sweeter" (III.i.5-6). The Duke's sermon on death, while addressed to Claudio, provides a central thematic focus, a touchstone by which the actions of all the characters may be assessed. The speech's extraordinary length and its centrality in the play emphasize this relevance. Angelo, Isabella, and Claudio are in

different ways and to different degrees death's fools. Unlike Claudio, Angelo and Isabella do not acknowledge their anxiety. Yet they are perhaps more fearful than Claudio. By turning away from love and marriage, they have denied the natural cycle of life and death. Ironically, their denial of death has led them into isolation. Their self-imposed restraints and fastidious correctness result in their confusion and powerlessness. Isabella cruelly and uncontrollably denounces her brother while Angelo falls to the more heinous sins of lust and fraud.

Claudio's poignant description of his fear and Isabella's subsequent rage push the play further towards tragedy. Not only have Isabella and Angelo become antagonists, but Isabella and Claudio are also at odds as well. Just when we stand in danger of forgetting the comic dimension of the play, however, Pompey, Elbow, and Lucio appear to remind us that while death jests, so too do clowns, and at death's expense. Pompey's neck, Elbow tells the "Friar," "will come to your waist--a cord, sir" (III.ii.40). The subplot parodies the confrontation between Claudio and Isabella and deflates the seriousness and the intensity of their conflict. Similar to Claudio, whom Isabella heatedly called a bawd, "thy sin's no accident but a trade" (III.i.148), the procurer Pompey stands forfeit to the law. Spotting Lucio, Pompey cries out for help, but his petition, like Claudio's is firmly denied. Pompey cries bail but receives only laughter and jibes from Lucio. Although Pompey kicks and screams as he is led away, there is little doubt that the nimble-witted fool will again elude the sharp edge of the law. If Pompey, then perhaps

Claudio, whose offenses are less, can also gain a reprieve in the end. We know, after all, that the Duke has a plan for Claudio's good and that Isabella, who heatedly swore not to help her brother, has now agreed to assist the "Friar."

Just as Pompey helps to diminish the frightfulness of Claudio's predicament, so too does the murderous rogue Barnardine. Barnardine descends from a long line of vices who refuse to die. Charlotte Spivack explains that because vices cannot anticipate immortality, they must resist all threats to their own survival.⁹ Barnardine caricatures humanity's obstinate defiance of death. The murderous rascal is quite literally Death's fool, for in trying to shun death, Barnardine sits in its very clutches. Between the sleep of death and the drunken stupor of Barnardine's life, there is little distinction. Pompey emphasizes this confusion of life and death when trying to arouse the rogue: "Pray, Master Barnardine, awake till you are executed, and sleep afterwards" (IV.iii.32-33). The groggy, obdurate villain reminds us of the Duke's reference to life as but an "after-dinner's sleep" (III.i.33), illusory and unreal. As Barnardine becomes a literal emblem of foolish mortality, he tempers the grimness of the Duke's ascetic lesson. This levity does not negate the importance of the Duke's words but lessens their severity. Comedy in this case humanizes the sacred, making it accessible and meaningful. In a similar way, the comical figures which decorate the margins of medieval psalters parody religious themes, breaking the barrier between the sacred and the profane. These figures, called *babuinares* after the Italian *babuino* or baboon, depict monkeys and other animals

performing human activities. In the margin of the Gorleston Psalter (c. 1305), for example, a delightfully comic procession of rabbits conducts a funeral with the greatest ceremony (Fig. 8).¹⁰ The rabbits stand erect, each performing with dignity his particular office. These rabbits, like Barnardine, provide gentle mockery of the sacred and remind us how deeply rooted we are in the things of this earth. Barnardine's comic defiance lightens the grave tone of Vincentio's lesson on mortality. Indeed, the entire scene with its profusion of merry criminals lifts the play from its weighty concern with death and sin and propels it towards a happy conclusion.

The play's denouement, like that of All's Well, emphasizes intercession as the regenerating principle. As Helena provides the sacrifice necessary for Bertram's salvation, so too Duke Vincentio, Mariana, and Isabella provide relief for Angelo. Duke Vincentio offers the first sacrifice needed to displace death. Our initial impressions of the Duke are of his inaccessibility and elusiveness. In the opening scene, we see him hastily preparing to leave the state. He tells neither Angelo nor Escalus why he is going, where he is going, or how he might be reached. The Duke's choice of Angelo for his substitute, as well as his words to Friar Thomas, make abundantly clear Vincentio's own inclination towards solitude and complacency. The Duke, like his deputy, views himself as independent, whole, and impenetrable to the emotions which afflict ordinary men: "No; holy father, throw away that thought; / Believe not that the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom" (I.iii.1-3). Duke Vincentio speaks not only of his disdain for love but of his proclivity to



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 8. Babuinares

a-b. Details from the Gorleston Psalter (c. 1305)

c. The Monkey Waggoner from the Luttrell Psalter (c. 1340)

isolation: "My holy sir, none better knows than you / How I have ever lov'd the life removed . . . " (I.iii.7-8). Vincentio has grown a stranger to his state. He has not only failed to marry, an act which would provide spiritual hope for his people, but also has neglected to impose his country's laws. The state, like Prospero's Milan becomes vulnerable by inattention. Vienna, however, is usurped not by a vicious brother as is Milan, but by wickedness and corruption itself. Lucio, Mistress Quickly, and Pompey are the grotesque usurpers of Vienna. "The baby beats the nurse," explains Vincentio, "and quite athwart / Goes all decorum" (I.iii.30). Hoping to correct this disorder, the Duke hands the reigns of government to Angelo.

Vincentio explains that he has placed Angelo in power so that severity might appear less tyrannous. The Duke, however, has another reason for putting Angelo in charge. Vincentio wishes to test the precise young man: " . . . hence shall we see / If power change purpose: what our seemers be" (I.iii.53-54). The Duke seems acutely aware of Angelo's deficiencies, of his coldness and austerity. And this selection of a ruler who seems doomed from the start, suggests an unspoken and perhaps unconscious motive; the Duke wishes to test not only Angelo but also himself. The fall of Angelo will necessarily set in motion the trial of Vincentio. Thus when Vincentio gives Angelo the seat of power and puts on the cloak of a lowly friar, he moves into a vulnerable position. The identity which the Duke selects, so opposite to that he has formerly enjoyed, emphasizes his readiness to see the world from a new perspective. His disguise carries connotations not of secular authority and preeminence but of religious

simplicity and obscurity. The name "friar" indeed means "brother" and implies involvement and kinship. When Elbow greets Duke Vincentio, "Bless you, good father friar" (III.ii.11-12), Vincentio's response emphasizes his new role as brother: "And you good brother father" (13). Although Vincentio laughs at the seeming contradiction in Elbow's salutation, there is meaning in the fool's mistake. For Vincentio while still maintaining his patriarchal stance now assumes in addition an intimate, filial relationship with his subjects. Just as the name "friar" implies kinship, the friar's cloak, so voluminous, suggests anonymity and death. Thus disguised, Vincentio metaphorically descends into Hades where he is able to view the true nature of the state. The descent, however, involves disillusionment and humiliation.

Act III, scene ii presents the mock-scourge of Vincentio. And it is Lucio's scurrilous wit that flouts Vincentio, driving him near the abyss of despair and paradoxically preparing him to assume his new identity as the true Duke of Vienna. The Duke has only moments before learned of Angelo's tyrannous bargain, has seen Claudio flip-flop between resignation to death and defiance, and has heard Isabella bitterly denounce her brother. Now, Vincentio must endure the arrogance of Lucio. Vincentio, who left his office hoping to avoid slander, "and yet my nature never in the fight / To do in slander" (I.iv.42-43), finds himself grossly maligned. The Duke's former inaccessibility and leniency are humorously satirized. Lucio calls the Duke's abrupt and mysterious departure from the state "a mad fantastical trick" (III.ii.92) and accounts for the Duke's indulgence

of vice by claiming that the Duke himself is lecherous: "He had some feeling of the sport; he knew the service, and that instructed him to mercy" (III.ii.119-20). Lucio's deduction parodies the lesson of self-knowledge that Isabella extended to Angelo. The Duke in Lucio's imaginings does not merely admit his own weakness, he revels in wickedness. Although Lucio maligns the Duke beyond all reason, his distortions hit their marks, for they point to the ineffectiveness of the Duke's former rule and of his present attempt to abolish lechery. As Lucio's comments pierce the reserve of Vincentio, we playfully mock the flustered Duke. Rosalind Miles correctly assesses our reaction to Lucio's abuse: "There is a malicious thrill in the event itself because the spectators cannot help but take pleasure in the Duke's discomfort, and in his powerlessness to have redress upon Lucio, or even to stop his tongue."¹¹ This scourge marks the nadir of the Duke's spiritual journey and the beginning of his ascent to power. As in the ancient rites of coronation in which the prospective ruler was taunted and scorned before achieving his new identity as king, so too Vincentio is scourged both by Lucio and by us. We enjoy the Duke's temporary distress, for to us Lucio appears more humorous than dangerous. He, like Parolles, is redeemed by his inventiveness. Lucio's lies, we know, will ultimately bring about his own destruction. To Vincentio, however, Lucio represents an uncontrollable force: "No might nor greatness in mortality / Can censure scape; back-wounding calumny / The whitest virtue strikes" (III.ii.185-87). The Duke's confrontation with sin, mortality, and impotence brings a new power, one grounded in faith. As he puts into

action his plan to save Angelo and Claudio, he becomes as persistent in turning ill to good as Lucio is in perpetuating folly.

The Duke not only accepts for himself the pain and confusion necessary for self-knowledge, but also instructs others to accept risk and sacrifice. The bed-trick, like the Duke's disguise, symbolically means a surrender of identity, a surrender to death. As the Duke's cloak provides anonymity, so too does the darkness disguising Mariana. Mariana's surrender of her virginity stands between Angelo and a deed so offensive that his punishment would be desired. Mariana not only rescues Angelo from sin and death, but also provides a means of extricating Isabella from a moral dilemma. For Isabella's submission to Angelo would place her in a repugnant light, as would her continued refusal to aid Claudio. Although Isabella escapes this moral crux, she nonetheless must compromise her earlier position. To participate in the bed-trick, Isabella must use deception. She accepts a less scrupulous and exacting ethic than before. The collapsing of the identities of Isabella and Mariana under the shield of darkness hints at a vicarious loss of Isabella's maidenhead. While Mariana's sacrifice is for Angelo, Isabella's is for Claudio. Isabella becomes for the first time vulnerable. She accepts the "Friar's" guidance and so demonstrates trust in a power not her own. When she hears of her brother's death, she momentarily reverts to her earlier impatience, regressing so far as to demand revenge: "I will to him [Angelo], and pluck out his eyes!" (IV.iii.19). Isabella must once more prove her trust. She does this by following the "Friar's" instructions though she does not know the full design of his plan.

She dislikes speaking indirectly but trusts in the "Friar's" simple assurance, "tis a physic / That's bitter to sweet end" (IV.v.7-8). The true test of Isabella's humility and faith, however, comes when Mariana begs her to plead for Angelo. The absolutist creed, "Like doth quit like and Measure still for Measure" (V.i.411), Isabella rejects for a more compassionate response. As Isabella has grown from her encounter with death, so too might Angelo. Indeed, it is Mariana's reminder that "best men are moulded out of faults" (V.i.339) that brings Isabella to her knees, the position that she scorned in Act III, scene i.

The sacrifices of the Duke, Isabella, and Mariana find a parody in Barnardine's refusal to become himself a victim. The Duke would gladly offer the rogue up as a substitute for Claudio: "Let this Barnardine be this morning executed, and his head borne to Angelo" (IV.ii.170-71). Barnardine, however, refuses to play John the Baptist for anyone's deliverance. This comical treatment of sacrifice diffuses our potential criticism of the play's weighty spiritual overtones as it points to the paradoxical nature of sacrifice itself. In a painting by Jean Fouquet of a play on the Martyrdom of St. Appolonia, we notice a similar use of humor to modify the terror of sacrifice (Fig. 9).¹² At the painting's center is the Saint, clothed all in white and roped tightly to an inclined board. Surrounding this serene figure are burly Jews expending great amounts of energy on her torments. To the left of this scene, a Vice or fool exposes his buttocks to our view. Though we feel sorry for the martyr, we cannot keep from laughing at the fool's obscene gesture.

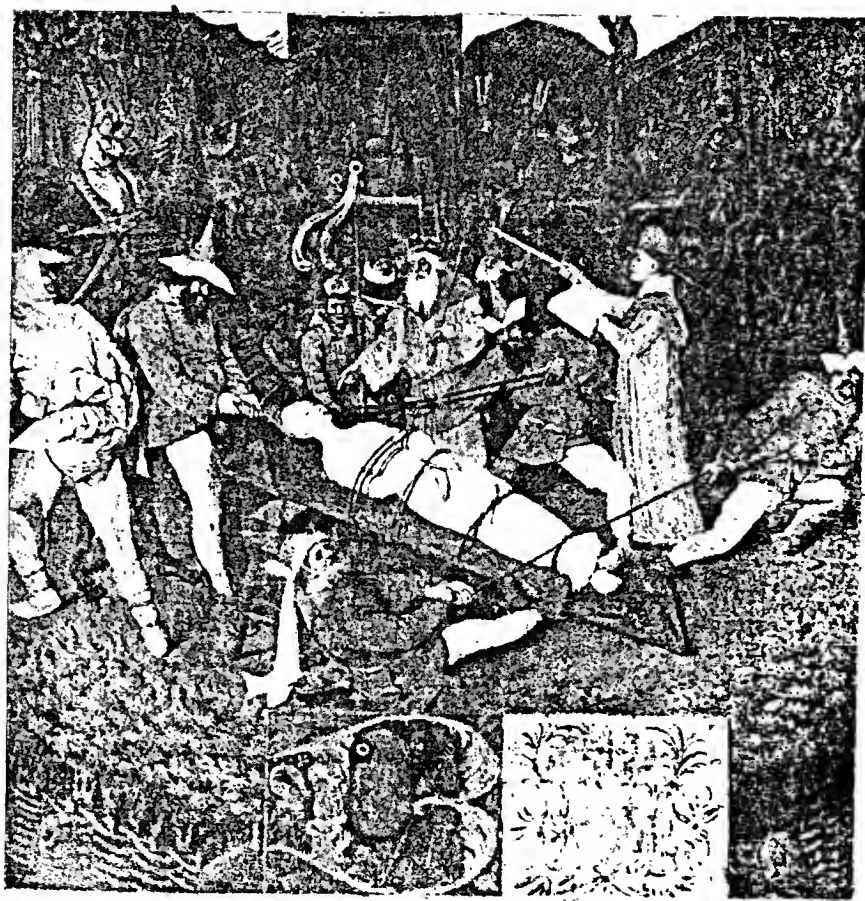


Fig. 9. Jean Fouquet, "Martyrdom of St. Appollonia," The Hours of Etienne Chevalier (15th century)

By satirizing the idea of sacrifice the fool channels and grounds our fear and hostilities. He works, to use Richard Levin's term, like "a lightning rod" allowing us a vehicle for expressing our emotions and thereby protecting the object satirized (in this case, sacrifice) from serious impairment.¹³ But while we laugh with the fool, we also laugh at him, for we sense from the Saint's composure and from the glimpse of heaven in the background, that the last laugh will be not on St. Appolonia but on the fool and the torturers. Like this stage fool, Barnardine enables us to mock the sacrificial victims, Vincentio, Isabella, and Mariana, at once venting our negative feelings and purifying the characters for their ascent. Barnardine as well sets in relief by his own mortal folly and self-centeredness, the sublime folly of love which is paradoxically the greatest wisdom.

Although repentance is necessary for the happy ending, the play's focus is not on contrition and penitence but on intercession and sacrifice. This emphasis becomes clear when we contrast the final scene of Measure for Measure to that of A Winter's Tale, for in both plays the most moving gesture is that of kneeling. In A Winter's Tale, Leontes kneels before the "statue" of his wife Hermione. After sixteen years of prayer and penance for his crimes, Leontes may kneel on his own behalf, expressing his humility, faith, and love. This is not so in Angelo's case, for he has not yet demonstrated the sincerity of his sorrow. Indeed there is little that Angelo can do to make us feel him worthy of the mercy he receives. Begging for mercy, he would seem more contemptible than he is. He must thus rely fully on the prayers of those he has offended. Angelo must accept the idea of

dependence that he has formerly scorned. While we may be troubled by Angelo's reprieve, Shakespeare's audience, familiar with representations of human wickedness and heaven's grace in religious plays would undoubtedly find comfort in the depiction of a love so great that it can erase the blackest sins. In The Castle of Perseverance, for example, intercession is crucial to the happy ending. God's daughters, Justitia, Veritas, Misericordia, and Pax, argue before God the case of Humanum Genus. Though Justice and Truth provide a strong case against Man, proving him unworthy of redemption, Mercy and Peace intercede on Man's behalf, reminding God of His own suffering and death for Man's sake. Weighing the cases both against and for Man, God responds on the side of Mercy:

My mercy, Mankind, geve I thee.
 Cum, sit at my ryth honde!
 Ful wel have I lovyd thee,
 Unkind though I thee fonde.
 As a sparke of fire in the se,
 My mercy is sinne-quenchand.

(3598-603)¹⁴

Bevington quotes St. Augustine in glossing, "Like a little spark in the midst of the sea (is all the wickedness of man to the mercy of God)."¹⁵ When we see the magnitude of God's mercy, then do we, striving to emulate this perfect love, pity and forgive reprobate Man. In Measure for Measure, our response to Isabella's plea for mercy is similar. She, like The Father Sitting in Judgment, provides a model of selfless love and challenges us to be merciful.

After dispensing with Angelo's case, the Duke turns to judge the unregenerate rogues, Barnardine and Lucio. They, even more than

Angelo, seem undeserving of the leniency they are shown. Lucio particularly is ungrateful, for to his pardon is attached a disagreeable stipulation, marriage to a whore. The forced marriage of Lucio to Kate Keepsake parodies the sacrifice and intercession of Isabella and Mariana. For Lucio, however, marriage does not displace death; marriage is death: "Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging" (V.i.522-23). The cuckold horns thus await Lucio, a fair price for slandering a prince. As Lucio is exposed, matched with Kate Keepsake, and carried away, so too is this alternative, marriage as death, ordered to the periphery of the city. The appropriateness of Lucio's fate reduces our desire for poetic justice. For like his ancestral Vice, Lucio is scourged for his own offenses as well as for those of others. Lucio becomes the general scapegoat, dissolving our scepticism, at least momentarily, into laughter and faith.

While All's Well and Measure for Measure touch the realities of personal isolation and social anarchy, they are not cynical in outlook, for they celebrate the ultimate triumph of love over tyranny and laughter over death. The reward justifies the long pilgrimage of pain. We may remain somewhat unconvinced by the eleventh hour conversions of Bertram and Angelo. Like Samuel Johnson, part of us would like poetic justice, or at least some guarantee that these proud young men will not repeat their mistakes.¹⁶ The generosity of Helena, the King of France, Isabella, Mariana, and Duke Vincentio, however, chastizes our obduracy, reminding us that the highest love asks for no future assurances but extends mercy wherever it is sought. As Portia

explained to the Venetian court, "The quality of mercy is not strain'd, / It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven / Upon the place beneath" (IV.i.184-86). Thus, far from closing on a skeptical note, the tragicomedies show that humanity possesses an extraordinary capacity for good as well as for evil and is indeed capable of mirroring the infinite love of God. Helena's unwavering devotion for Bertram reminds us of God's abiding love for degenerate humanity while Isabella's plea for Angelo mirrors Christ and the Virgin Mary in their roles as advocate and intercessor. As goodness finds its reward in the end, so too evil and death meet with mockery and laughter. The comical defeat of Parolles and Lucio assures us that pride and even death itself are impotent and foolish in the presence of faith.

Notes

¹Charlotte Spivack, p. 27. See introduction, p. 2-3.

²Richard Levin, p. 139.

³David Bevington, ed., The Complete Works of Shakespeare, 3rd ed. (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1951), p. 476.

⁴Lawrence Sargent Hall, "Isabella's Angry Ape," Shakespeare Quarterly, 15 (1964), 161-162.

⁵H. W. Janson, "Apes and Ape-Lore," Warburg Studies, 20 (1952), 213. Also see G. K. Hunter's "Six Notes on Measure for Measure," Shakespeare Quarterly, 15 (1964), 169.

⁶E. Clive Rouse, "A Vivid Portrayal of the Rewards and Pains of Mediaeval Right and Wrong whose Recent Discovery was unwittingly aided by a German Air Raider: Fourteenth-Century Mural Paintings from a Lincolnshire Church," The Illustrated London News, Jan. 3, 1948, p. 24. These words come from the painting of the Three Living and the Three Dead that is found on the wall of the remote church of St. Andrew, Pickworth, Lincolnshire.

⁷Saint Augustine of Hippo, De Sermone Domini in Monte Secundum Mattaeum in ed. Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources, Vol. II, pp. 418-419. After telling the story of a woman who submits her body to a tyrant to save her husband's life, Saint Augustine declines to argue either for or against the woman's deed though his sympathies clearly lie in her favor: "But when the incident is told, man's moral sense is not so ready to condemn what happened in this woman's case at the behest of her husband, as we were shocked before when the case itself was suggested without any illustration."

⁸Ariès, p. 175. Ariès discusses the many Masses held for a single dead person in Chapter 4 which is entitled, "Guarantees of Eternity." "One thousand," he says, "was a common number." Ariès quotes from a will of 1394: "That on the day of my funeral and the following day there be said and celebrated one thousand Masses by poor chaplains [priest who lived on the income from chapels, that is, on pious endowments, mostly funerary] in the churches of Paris [five hundred Masses a day!], and that each chaplain be given II sous for his Mass." And the same desire for quantity, explains Ariès, we find as late as 1790.

⁹Charlotte Spivack, p. 85.

¹⁰Joan Evans, plate 24-b.

¹¹Rosaline Miles, The Problem of "Measure for Measure" (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976), p. 188.

¹²Jean Fouquet, "The Martyrdom of St. Appolonia," Book of Hours of Etienne Chevalier. Illust. reproduced in ed., Bevington, Medieval Drama, p. 898.

¹³Levin, p. 28.

¹⁴The Castle of Perseverance, in ed. Bevington, Medieval Drama, p. 898.

¹⁵Bevington, ed., Medieval Drama, p. 898.

¹⁶Samuel Johnson, Notes on Measures for Measure in Johnson on Shakespeare: Essays and Notes, ed. Walter Raleigh (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1908), p. 80. "Angelo's crimes were such, as must sufficiently justify punishment, whether its end be to secure the innocent from wrong, or to deter guilt by example; and I believe every reader feels some indignation when he finds him spared."

CHAPTER VII
"HORN-PYPES AND FUNERALLS":
SUGGESTIONS OF HOPE IN THE TRAGEDIES

As death converges with humor in Shakespeare's tragedies, our sense of the grotesque reaches its highest pitch. Death is now literal and ominous. It cannot be averted as in the comedies by a symbolic gesture of humility but must be confronted at its most hideous and awesome. As death becomes more terrifying, so its convergence with gaiety becomes increasingly discordant. So disturbing have some editors, directors, and critics found this comical intrusion that they have dismissed it from their considerations of the tragedies. The porter's gay role-playing in Macbeth (II.iii.1-21), the musicians' playful quarrel with Peter in Romeo and Juliet (IV.v.101-46), and the clown's spirited quibbling in Antony and Cleopatra (V.ii.242-79) have met with notable neglect.¹ Even the gravemaker scene of Hamlet has suffered critical erasure. Maurice Evans, for example, deletes the gravedigger scene completely from his "GI" production of Hamlet, dismissing it as a mere contrivance to give Will Kemp a chance to display his comic talents.² Although many have objected to the burlesque episodes of Shakespeare's tragedies, a careful look at these scenes in relation to each play's total design will show both their relevance to the action and their importance to a play's tragic effect.

Sir Philip Sidney anticipates the modern predilection for tragic purity. In An Apologie for Poetry, he denounces the popular playwrights of his day who mingle humor and gravity:

But if we marke them [the ancients] we shall find that they never, or very daintily, match Horn-pypes and Funeralls. So falleth it out that, hauing indeed no right Comedy, in that comicall part of our Tragedy we have nothing but scurrility, unworthy of any chast eares, or some extreame shew of doltishness, indeed fit to lift vp a loude laughter, and nothing els: Where the whole tract of a Comedy shoulde be full of delight, as the Tragedy shoulde be still maintained in a well raised admiration.³

Sidney's remarks on incongruity may shed some light on the function of Shakespeare's comic-tragic fusion. The mistake that playwrights often make, explains Sidney, is in confusing delight with laughter. Although laughter and delight may arise from a single incident, the two are in themselves opposed. Delight "has a joy in it" and springs from things proportioned and apt. Laughter, on the other hand, is "a scornful tickling," arising from things disproportioned and incongruous. Sidney here considers laughter as satiric, vituperatio. Thus while they may appear simultaneously, Sidney explains, laughter does not spring from delight as many believe. Illustrating his point, Sidney refers to the brawny, heavily-bearded Hercules who, dressed in woman's clothes, spins the distaff of Omphale. Delight and laughter here arise at once, "For the representing of so strange a power in love procureth delight: and the scornfulness of the action stirrith laughter."⁴ While censorious laughter and delight are often independent responses, as Sidney holds, there may at times exist a paradoxical affinity between the

two. If we examine closely Sidney's image of Hercules spinning the distaff, we find that laughter and delight are not merely simultaneous occurrences but are interrelated effects. While delight does not here induce laughter, laughter does increase our delight. It is our laughter, mocking though it is, that informs us of the intensity of Hercules' passion, of his willingness to sacrifice his identity and his dignity for the love of Iole. Just as comic degradation is essential to delight in the case of Hercules, it is similarly important to tragic joy in the cases of Hamlet, Macbeth, Cleopatra, and Juliet. Through the clown's own foolishness and through his satirical jibes, we glimpse the frailty and the folly of the protagonists and this in turn heightens our awareness of their passions. In Act IV, scene iii of Romeo and Juliet, Juliet gives her imagination free reign to the horrors of premature burial and then lifts the dreaded vial to her lips with the pledge, "Romeo, Romeo, Romeo! Here's drink--I drink to thee" (58). As she swallows the potion, we realize her desperation and her pain. No sooner does she fall into a death-like sleep, however, than we are propelled into the world of comedy. We enjoy the domestic hustle and bustle of the Capulet servants who are preparing for the day's wedding festivities. Old Capulet's officious ordering of the servants, Angelica's bawdy jests, the nurse and Lady Capulet's exaggerated lamentations, and Peter and the musicians' farcical quarrel suggest something comical about Juliet's situation and about Juliet herself. The implied ridicule about these earth-bound creatures allows us to feel more intensely Juliet's isolation and

foolishness. Like Hercules, Juliet suffers comic degradation. By refusing to honor her parents' wishes and marry Paris, Juliet has estranged herself from the compromising world of ordinary humanity. Her actions are surely impudent if not rash. But in proportion to their foolishness, her passion and commitment also touch the sublime. Juliet has accepted the ultimate risk, defamation and death.

Like Juliet, the archetypal scapegoat and sacrificial victim mingles the sacred with the profane, wisdom with foolishness. In ancient cultures, the distinction between king and god was constantly blurred. Since the god-king was associated with fertility and with the spiritual health of the land, it is understandable that in time he would become linked to a more humble symbol of fecundity and joy, the fool. Because he was associated with the earth's vital forces and perhaps because he was expendable and stupid enough to die willingly, the fool often became the surrogate King in ancient rituals of renewal.⁵ Exalted for a period of time, until his identification with the king was complete, the fool would then be mocked, scourged, and slain. The victim's foolishness, as it indicates his humanity, provides the people with a bridge to the sacred. Realizing the interrelation of the absurd and the sublime, we should not be surprised to find a painting by one of the earliest followers of Christ representing the crucified lord with an ass's head.⁶ In the Corpus Christi cycles, Christ suffers similar indignities. The Wakefield Caiaphas in the Buffeting, for example, calls Christ "Kyng Copyn in oure game"⁷ while the tortores of the

York cycle dress Christ in the white robes of a fool and make him the butt of their games and japes.⁸ Here, of course, the plays satirize the torturers who do not see Christ's divine nature and the spectators who daily reopen Christ's wounds by their sins. The association of Christ with a fool is not merely ironic, however, for it points to the paradox at the heart of sacrifice. To willingly suffer humiliation and death for the salvation of another defies our most fundamental instinct of self-preservation and thus seems the height of folly. The action, on the other hand, is life-affirming. Because it is the highest demonstration of love, it is paradoxically the wisest and most sacred of actions.⁹ Unlike Christ, the tragic protagonist of Shakespeare's plays is not a deity who can carry the sins of the world and remain pure. He or she must fully absorb the evil to be purged. The term "foolish" thus bears a more sinister meaning when applied to the mortal scapegoats of Shakespeare's tragedies. Indeed, foolishness in the case of Macbeth is identical with the demonic.

The striking change in tone at the entry of the clowns suggests that we stand at an important juncture in a tragedy. We recall that comic interludes were sometimes used in medieval drama to separate distinctive movements of the plot. So, too, the comical intrusions in Shakespeare's tragedies may signal a directional change. In Macbeth, for example, the episode of the drunken porter separates the act of regicide from its necessary retribution. The porter, as his name implies, is a transitional figure. He stands between the starless night that seals Macbeth's murderous deed and the new dawn

whose diffusive light directs Scotland to gaze upon bloody Duncan. As in Macbeth, so too in Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and Antony and Cleopatra, the impertinent clowns signal the protagonists' changed or changing position in the play. The clown's gaiety in the face of death suggests an inversion of roles. Luke I: 52 comes to mind: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." This passage that underlies the Boy Bishop's feast seems fitting here, for the protagonist is now discomfited and the commoner is jolly.¹⁰ And even more suitable is I Corinthians 1: 27 which emphasizes the spiritual priority not only of the weak but also of the foolish: "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." Although formerly secure, the cynosure of society, the hero or heroine is now exceedingly vulnerable. He or she has assumed the passive role of the scapegoat. Hamlet's return to Denmark, Juliet's swallowing of the Friar's potion, and Cleopatra's acceptance of the asp are all submissive responses to the call of death. Although Macbeth never submits to his destiny as fully as do the other victims, he nonetheless becomes increasingly numbed and inert. The active champion of Scotland in Act I will become in the acts that follow reactionary and defensive. Macbeth's sole endeavor will consist of warding off the dual furies, conscience and discovery.

By first encouraging our sympathies for the hero or heroine and by then distancing us from him or her, the clowns contribute to our release from the bonds of death. The clowns' queer gaiety places in

stark relief death's claim upon the protagonist. Realizing death's imminence, we pity the protagonist. We identify with the victim and see in his or her mortality our own. We recognize in the scapegoat's folly or sinfulness the dark potentialities existing in ourselves. The identification allows us to transfer our guilt to the protagonist. As the clowns hold before us a mirror of life, however, we sense a regenerative power that can turn pain into joy and disease into health. We join with these forces of life, disengaging ourselves from the doomed creatures who must bear our guilt and our pain.

Thus the clowns presage both death and life. With the exception of the burlesque figures in Romeo and Juliet, the merry harbingers bear no proper names. They are undeveloped, anonymous characters who appear suddenly, electrify the grim milieu with their indecorous antics, and disappear to be heard from no more. The startling appearance of these mysterious characters recalls the alarming image of Death in the renaissance Vado Mori and in the Dance of Death. Holbein's engraving of the queen and Death is particularly relevant, for here Death wears the cap and bells of a medieval jester (Fig. 10).¹¹ The inversion of roles in Holbein's Dance is bitterly ironic, for the queen, who on a former day might have commanded her fool to perform, is now herself ordered to dance by Antic Death. A similar inversion occurs in Shakespeare's tragedies. But while Shakespeare's antics approach their "victims" with the amused detachment of Holbein's jester, they possess an element of childlike innocence that is absent from Holbein's figure of Death. Unlike



Fig. 10. Hans Holbein, "The Queen" from Dance of Death (1538)

Holbein's high-spirited skeleton, Shakespeare's sportive commoners are not court jesters. The distinction is significant, for the court or household jester in Shakespeare's plays is a sophisticated professional who uses his wit like a "stalkinghorse" to pierce the pretensions and illusions of his patrons. While Shakespeare's merry reapers delight in the duplicity of words like the professional jesters, they do not seem fully aware of the import of their quibbles and jibes. They seem hybrid creatures, partaking of the wit of clever jesters, like Lear's fool, Touchstone, and Lavatch, and the innocent gaiety of bungling fools, such as Bottom, Dogberry, and Elbow. It is their affinity to these naturals, their capacity for childlike joy, that turns satiric inversion, like that of Holbein's dance, into festive topsyturvydom. Thus while "a scornful tickling" contributes to our laughter, our laughter also springs from a humane and generous delight. The function of Shakespeare's gay harbingers is then primarily saturnalian. And satire in these scenes waits upon mirthful celebration.

The porter scene of Macbeth illustrates the clown's affinity to death and life and his ability to bring us intimations of tragic joy. As the drowsy porter staggers to the gate to receive the early morning visitors, he brings to mind weary and disturbed Macbeth. We recall Macbeth's envy of the sleeping guards and of their innocent prayers. And we remember his chilling prophecy, "Cawdor / Shall sleep no more" (II.ii.39-40). The thane and his lady's hasty change into night-clothes at the sound of knocking emphasizes the truth that Macbeth has killed sleep. As the **porter** underscores Macbeth's

fatigue and regret, our sympathy rises for the already haunted thane. We realize too that Macbeth, having cut himself off from this life-nurturing balm, must soon die. The knocking's disturbance of the porter's sleep and its startling effect upon Macbeth tell us that retribution has wasted no time in pressing its claim. As the porter welcomes the imaginary reaper, "Come in time!" (II.iii.5), he seems a genius of death, signaling Macbeth's irreversible movement towards destruction. The porter, however, with his humorous role-playing and indecent puns, is just as surely a figure of life. Macduff's persistent knocking and the porter's allusion to hell gate bring to mind not only the sudden visitation of death upon sinners, a frequent motif in the literature of the age, but also the victory of Christ over hell in the apocryphal harrowing of hell.¹² Hell was often depicted in medieval plays and paintings as a castle, and Christ was shown to pound repeatedly upon the gate before bursting through and scattering the minions of hell.¹³ Macduff's entry into Inverness parallels Christ's entry into hell-castle and foreshadows Macduff's defeat of Macbeth and the resulting triumph of Scotland. The porter thus opens the door both to death and to life. The farmer, the equivocator, and the tailor must dance down the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire. We also imagine, however, countering their descent, the ascent of Adam and Eve, the prophets, and the patriarchs who are taken by the hand of Christ and escorted to Paradise. And as we watch Macbeth follow the lesser sinners to Hell, we sense Scotland's future victory and our own release from death.

Like the farcical episodes of Marlow's Dr. Faustus, the porter's comical greeting of sinners to hell diminishes the grandeur of the fallen hero. And the allusion to Christ's harrowing adds to the irony of Macbeth's fall. Medieval and renaissance painters often depict Jesus as a knight, like Saint George, thrusting a sword into the heart of the dragon and pressing its head underfoot (Figs. 11-12). In the first act, the sergeant describes Macbeth's defeat of the rebel Macdonwald in similar terms: " . . . he unseem'd him from the nave to th' chops, / And fix'd his head upon the battlements" (ii.22-23). The porter now shatters this heroic image. Macbeth is no longer the victorious defender of righteousness but a small, despicable rebel destined, like the farmer, the equivocator, and the tailor, to defeat.¹⁴ Macbeth's shrinkage underscores his role as mock-king. Macbeth is a foolish and expendable usurper of majesty. By first eliciting our sympathy for Macbeth, the porter encourages us to accept him as our substitute. By then drawing forth our disdain, he prepares us for Macbeth's final diminution and readies us to release the shrunken king to his death. In Act V, Angus describes the diminished ruler as he awaits Malcolm's forces: "Now does he feel his title / Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief" (ii.20-21). Macbeth suffers an even more degrading death than Macdonwald. The tyrant's head is not merely "fixed . . . upon the battlement" but is severed from his body and held up in contempt before the armies. With the help of the sportive porter, we find hope in this grotesque emblem. For us, as for Scotland, "the time is free."



Fig. 11. The Harrowing of Hell from The St. Albans Psalter (12th century)



Fig. 12. The Harrowing of Hell, detail from an initial of
The St. Albans Psalter (12th century)

A chilling irony infuses such burlesque moments as that involving the porter, for the audience, more keenly than the protagonist, feels death's approach. Two portraits utilizing the memento mori tradition may help to demonstrate the sympathy bred for the protagonist by the sudden entrance of Shakespeare's grotesques. In some of the illustrations accompanying Vado Mori lyrics and poems of the Dance of Death, representative figures, kings, ladies, knights, etc., are portrayed about their usual business. They do not seem to notice the grinning skeletons lurking behind them, weapons poised for attack (Fig. 13). One moral poem reads, "This day I satt full royally in a chayre. / Tyll sotyll deth knokkid at my gate / And unavised he said to me, 'chekmate'!"¹⁵ The N Town Death of Herod explores the dramatic potential of this tradition. We first see Herod rejoicing at the death of the innocents. As he boasts his preeminence and gormandizes at a sumptuous feast, the figure of Death approaches, unnoticed to any but the audience. The irony mounts as Death exclaims: "Dw! Se how proudly yon Kaitiff sitt at mete! / Of Death hat he no dowte; he wenith to leve evrymoer. / To him wil I go and geve him such an hete / That all the lechis of the londe his life shul nevyr restore" (194-197).¹⁶ By substituting a specific biblical personage in the place of the generic "king," the N Town modifies the tradition of sudden death. Herod, however, is much more a type than a flesh and blood individual, and so the emphasis remains homiletic. We find the convention radically altered, however, in Holbein's portrait of Sir Brian Tuke and in a portrait of a young man painted in 1524 and signed H. F. (Hans Fries!).¹⁷ The victims are

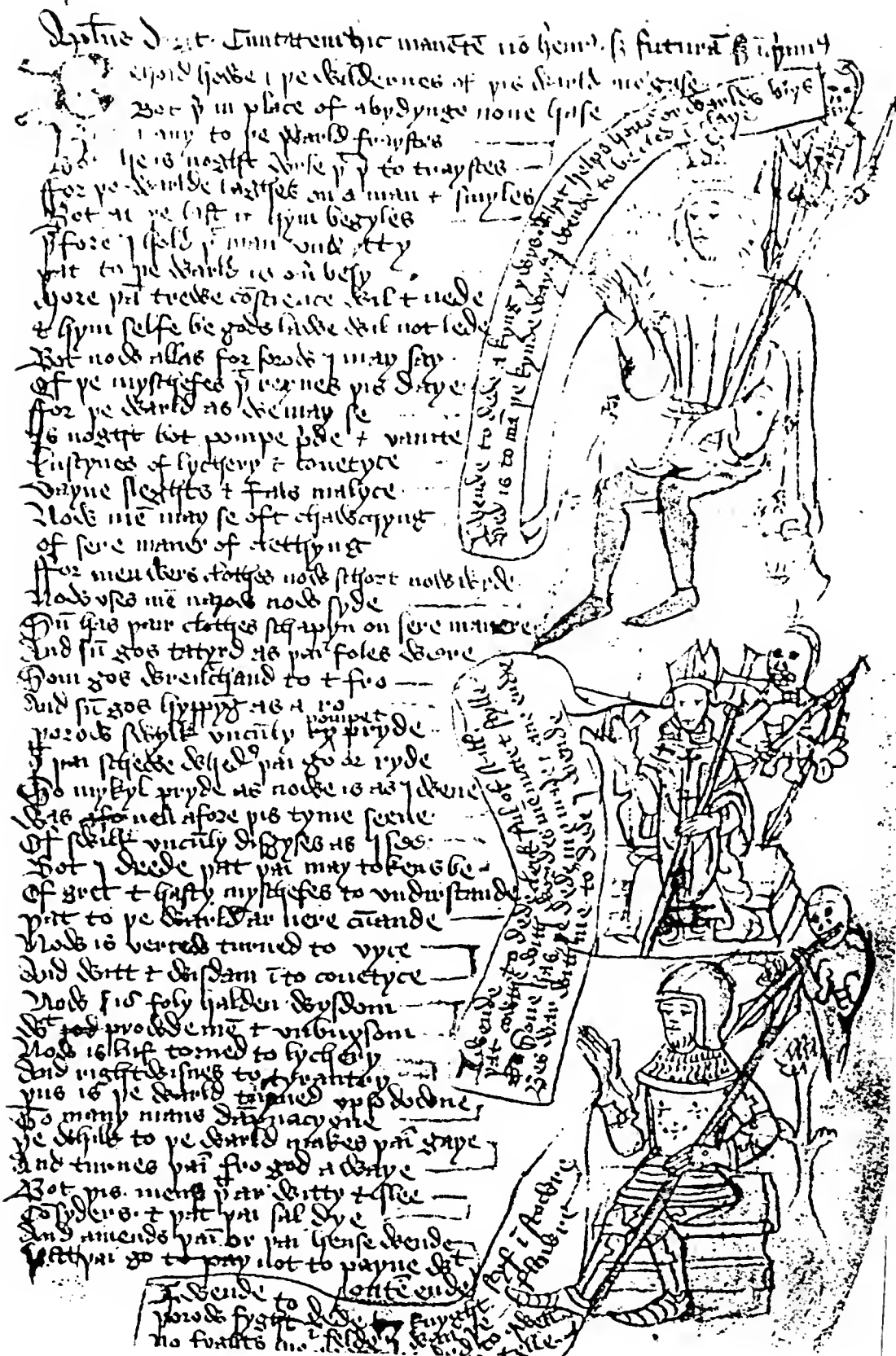


Fig. 13. Vado Mori, an anonymous poem (15th century)

now highly individualized. The figure of Death still glares menacingly over its victim's shoulder. Unlike Herod, these men are prepared for death. Sir Brian Tuke, for example, points to a passage from Job, "Will not the small number of my days be soon ended?" (Fig. 14). Although the victims are pious, the irony in these paintings is nevertheless biting, for the distinctive personal quality of these gentlemen engages our sympathies. We pity these men as we cannot Herod, for Herod possesses no redeemable characteristics. As we recognize the traditional memento mori context of these portraits, the finger of death turns towards us. Sir Brian Tukes and the young man painted by H. F. are not only renaissance lords, but also Everyman. By employing the convention of the unwary victim, the portraits pull together the personal and the homiletic. A similar irony penetrates Shakespeare's tragedies when the impish clowns come into view. As Hamlet asks the gravemaker for whom he digs the grave, we know, though Hamlet does not, that the grave is meant for Ophelia. We also realize that Ophelia's death has placed Hamlet in direst jeopardy for it has doubled the ire of Laertes and his determination to take revenge. The gravemaker scene not only harbors irony, but it also overlays the specific and the general. The skulls of Ophelia, Yorick, and Alexander will mingle with that of "my Lord Such-a-one, that prais'd my / Lord Such-a-one's horse . . . " (V.i.84-85). The scene thus allows us to experience a crucial moment in the story of Hamlet and at the same time provides us with a forceful reminder of our own mortality. With an enhanced sense of our mortal limitations, we are able to move beyond



Fig. 14. Hans Holbein, Portrait of Sir Brian Tuke from Munich Pinakothek

identification with those facing death to a new identity. Self-knowledge, as the renaissance typically perceived it, meant knowing oneself in relation to God, people, and the cosmos. It meant realizing the inevitability of death and seeing the potential for immortality. The mistaken choices of the heroes and heroines have made their deaths unavoidable. With the knowledge of their errors and a consciousness of our own frailty, however, we are free to shape our own destinies. Aware of our vulnerability, we begin to trust a power larger than ourselves, a power we may call God or simply life. After the initial shock of death's nearness subsides, we proceed to enjoy the levity of the clowns. The clowns hint at the healing power of laughter and beckon us to enter into their magical arena of play. As we participate in their unconscious mockery, we begin to separate from those who must soon die. With this release comes a sense of freedom and hope. The clowns thus prepare us to realize and accept the unavoidable calamity that awaits the protagonist and simultaneously to anticipate the sense of freedom and reintegration that this death will make possible.

Notes

¹Michael J. B. Allen, "Macbeth's Genial Porter," English Literary Renaissance, 4 (1974), 326. Herbert MacArthur, "Romeo's Loquacious Friend," Shakespeare Quarterly, 10 (1959), 38. Michael Steppat, The Critical Reception of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra from 1607 to 1905 (Amsterdam: Veriag B. R. Gruner, 1980), p. 89.

²B. L. Reid, "The Last Act and the Action of Hamlet," Yale Review, 54 (1964), 59. Maurice Evans not only misjudges the importance of the Gravemakers' scene to the tragedy but also is guilty of historical inaccuracy. Will Kemp left Shakespeare's

company in 1599. His replacement Robert Armin probably played the part of the leading gravemaker.

³Sir Philip Sidney, An Apologie for Poetry in English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance, ed. U. B. Hardison, Jr. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 139.

⁴Sidney, p. 140.

⁵Welsford, pp. 68-69.

⁶Harvey Cox, The Feast of Fools (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969), p. 140.

⁷Bevington, ed., Medieval Drama, p. 542.

⁸The York Cycle of Mystery Play: A Complete Version, ed. J. S. Purvis (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), p. 245.

⁹In King Lear, Cordelia exemplifies this selfless, Christlike love by risking her life to save the father who rejected her. Her death brings to Lear's lips the cry, "and my poor fool is hang'd!" (V.iii.306). Although Lear uses the word "fool" as a term of endearment, it suggests the loyal jester who suffered with the King on the heath. And if indeed Lear's fool and Cordelia were played by the same actor in Shakespeare's day, as some critics suggest, the relationship between folly and sacrifice becomes still more highly charged. While Cordelia serves as an emblem of Christian sacrifice, she does not absolve our guilt. It is Lear, the tragic protagonist, who must perform this task.

¹⁰Robert Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function, trans. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), p. 21. Weimann sees the connection between the idea of Utopia and topsy-turvydom as significant: "As early as the Roman Saturnalia such topsy-turvydom was associated with a Utopian dream of the Golden Age. The festive abolition of inequality and the playful exchange of roles between masters and servants defined the 'democratic character' of the Saturnalia, which ostensibly served to 'preserve the memory of the original state of nature where every man was equal'." The sense of topsyturvy inversion that pervades the comic-tragic moment of Shakespeare's tragedies hints at just such a return to equality and peace. Death, the great equalizer, ironically bears the seeds of a Utopian dream.

¹¹Hans Holbein, p. 11.

¹²In poetry of the middle ages and the renaissance, death was often personified as knocking at its victim's door or gate. See the example in this paper on page 10. John Webster Spargo gives a detailed look at the relationship between knocking and death in his

article, "The Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth: An Essay in Interpretation," Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies, ed. James G. McManaway, Giles E. Dawson, and Edwin E. Willoughby (Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948). Two excellent articles deal with the porter scene's allusion to the harrowing of hell: Glynne Wickham's "Hell-Castle and Its Door-Keeper," Shakespeare Survey, 19 (1970), 68-74, and John B. Harcourt's "I Pray You, Remember the Porter," Shakespeare Quarterly, 12 (1961), 393-402. Wickham explains that "On the medieval stage hell was represented as a castle, more particularly as a dungeon or cesspit within a castle, one entrance to which was often depicted as a dragon's mouth. Its gate was guarded by a janitor or porter. Christ, after his crucifixion, but before his resurrection, came to the castle of hell to demand of Lucifer the release of the souls of the patriarchs and prophets. . . . Christ's arrival was signalled by a tremendous knocking at this gate and a blast of trumpets" (pp. 68-69). Frederic B. Tromly in "Macbeth and his Porter," Shakespeare Quarterly, 26 (1975), 151-156, takes still another look at the scene. He argues against Harcourt's view that the scene functions to isolate Macbeth. For Harcourt, the scene works to humanize the tyrant by forcing us to recognize him in the ordinary porter. While critics tend to read the scene as either drawing us into sympathy with Macbeth or isolating us from him, they do not acknowledge that the scene in fact does both. The porter is the master equivocator, moving us to both pity and contempt.

¹³William Henry Hulme, ed., The Middle English Harrowing of Hell and the Gospel of Nicodemus (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Limited, 1907), p. ixv.

¹⁴Harcourt, p. 395. I agree with Harcourt that the porter's reference to the petty sinners serves to "destroy the pseudo-heroic illusion."

¹⁵Roman Dyboski, ed., Songs, Carols, and Other Miscellaneous Poems (London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner & Co., Limited, 1907), pp. 87-88.

¹⁶The Death of Herod (N Town) in ed. Bevington, Medieval Drama, p. 456.

¹⁷Weber, pp. 137, 796.

CHAPTER VIII
"THIS MIGHT BE THE PATE OF A POLITICIAN, WHICH THIS
ASS O'ERREACHES, ONE THAT WOULD CIRCUMVENT GOD . . . ":
SATURNALIAN SACRIFICE IN SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET

The image of Ophelia's grave dominates the final movement of Denmark's tragedy. Enlivened by the jests of gravemakers, the smell of skulls, and the grappling of courtiers, the grave beckons the living to experience its terrors and prepare for death. As in the Dance of Death, the grave draws opposites to a dissonant encounter. Peasant and gentleman (the gravemakers and Hamlet), philosopher and fool (Hamlet and the gravemakers, Horatio and Hamlet), lover and sweetheart (Hamlet and Ophelia), priest and courtier (Doctor of Divinity and Laertes), and victim and culprit (Hamlet and Claudius, Claudius and Hamlet, Hamlet and Laertes, Laertes and Hamlet, Laertes and the King, Ophelia and Hamlet)--all clash and then submerge under the weight of the Leveler Death. The past and the present also collapse as Ophelia joins the ranks of the dead. She, like the ancient sinner Adam, must now suffer the indignity of the gravediggers' jests. Time fuses, and so too do the tragic and comic patterns that operate in time. While the gravedigger's abuse of decorum and his logical aberrations point to death's disruption of order, his gaiety and foolishness suggest an unquenchable life-force that surges even in the face of tragedy. The

gravemaker may be a harbinger of death, but he also quiets our anxiety by giving us an immediate representation of life.

As in the ancient saturnalia, satire and gaiety intermingle first to banish guilt and death and then to celebrate the resurgence of life. So direct is our contact with Hamlet's experience that we transfer our destructive impulses to him. As Hamlet suffers and dies, he symbolically expunges the guilt both of Denmark and of the audience. Herbert Weisinger explains that this transfer of guilt accounts for our strange sense of joy as we view the hero's agony and death. The hero chooses a wrong course of action and "the result of that choice is our own escape and our enlightenment."¹ This new sense of freedom fosters a desire for celebration. In ancient rites of renewal, revelry was believed to further the union of nature deities and thus to encourage the renewal of the earth.² Now we, somewhat like the parent deities, are sympathetically moved to look beyond personal tragedy and enjoy the celebration of life.

As we listen to and watch the two loquacious gravemakers busily plying their trade, we remember the contemporary Dance of Death. An understanding of this tradition's mixture of macabre imagery and satiric gaiety should help to illuminate Shakespeare's blending of disparate effects. In the Dance of Death, repugnant details rivet the viewer's attention on the terrors of death. Skulls, shrouds, caskets and worms are powerful emblems of the unsavory end to which all humanity must come. Fear is not evoked for its own sake, however, but serves to attack complacency and to draw people to faith. The relics of the dead serve as memento mori, reminding

humanity of death's unexpectedness and of the urgency of spiritual preparation. Self-knowledge, the recognition of inherent human guilt and humanity's need for God, is the stern but hopeful lesson of the macabre. Contrasting with this ascetic imagery, however, is the festive mood of the dance itself. While *Antic Death* satirizes personal vanity and social institutions, it simultaneously invites its viewer to enjoy the revels, to partake of the freedom of the dance. In The Dance of Death in Folksong, Henri Stegemeier states that the tradition unites two opposite ideas: that of " 'death,' something horrible, dismal and austere" and " 'dance,' greatest pleasure and complete enjoyment." The Dance of Death, he explains, "should be interpreted as the healthy reaction of the people against the unnatural asceticism of the church."³

An illustration entitled "The Daunce and Song of Death" bears a striking resemblance to Shakespeare's scene not only in tone but also in composition.⁴ In both, the action revolves around a freshly dug grave and a diseased but merry figure labeled "Syckness, Deathes Minstrel." In the illustration, the tools of a gravedigger, a pick and an axe, stretch across the grave to support a stool of bones. Upon this stool, the diseased figure sits playing a horn and a drum. The grave, now infused with music, no longer represents only death; it has also become an image of life as well. As in Shakespeare's scene, opposites converge at the axis of the grave. Skeletons and representative social types dance to the minstrel's music. A king grips the hand of a beggar, an old man clasps the hand of a child, and a wise man holds the hand of a fool. All dance

around the grave as they might once, on a bright spring morning, have danced around a maypole. Although the skeletons are festive, the people seem reticent in their steps. Like Shakespeare's characters, they appear to be partly enticed and partly coerced to dance to the music of death.

Like death's minstrel, Shakespeare's gravediggers point to the dialectic of life and death. When the rustics discuss the subject of gentility, we see the dual nature of their role. The first clown explains, "There is no ancient gentlemen but gard'ners, ditchers, and gravemakers; they hold up Adam's profession" (V.i.29-31). We understand that the gravedigger shares more in common with Adam than the fact that they both dig in the earth. Adam brought upon all humanity original sin and consequently death. In the physical sense, the gravemaker prepares the grave for man and so completes what Adam long ago began. His physical labor is the gravemaker's role in the service of death. But the clown's words simultaneously indicate the cyclical process of life and death. The grave-digging clown is the counterpart of Adam, the farmer; one digs to bury the dead, the other to plant the seeds of new life. The gravedigger's merry jibes and quibbles when discussing death illustrate not only his recognition that all living things must die, but also his acceptance of this natural process.

By disregarding the function of the macabre in Christian worship and in popular traditions, such as The Dance of Death, critics often misinterpret the gravedigger's humor and Hamlet's reflections on death. Susan Snyder, for example, sees in this scene intimations of

nihilistic absurdity. She insists that the graveyard questions the grounds for all action; for death, which renders human remains indistinguishable, indicates a meaningless world.⁵ Death, however, does not for the renaissance Christian negate all meaning. The skull dissolves only temporal meanings and questions actions for temporal ends. The Antic Leveler points its bony finger not at the existence of an immortal soul, but at earthly fame, beauty and knowledge. Alexander, Ophelia, and the cunning lawyer are identical in death to Yorick, the fool. Hamlet too is imaged in the "chop-fall'n" skull of the jester, for the grave questions emphatically the ethic of revenge.

We first become aware of death's negation of temporal values when we overhear the gravemakers exchange remarks on the subject of a young gentlewoman who recently has taken her own life. We soon realize that the lady they speak of so freely is Ophelia. Their indelicate quibbles at her expense violently jar against the Queen's lyrical rendering of her drowning in the scene just prior:

" . . . But long it could not be / Till that her garments, heavy with their drink, / Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death" (V.i.180-83). These words capture the essence of Ophelia's tragedy, because like a helpless animal Ophelia has been entrapped by circumstances beyond her understanding or control. The gravediggers, however, catapult us from our romantic perspective and force us to see Ophelia in an objective and comical light. Ophelia is no longer associated with elegiac images, with "pendant boughs" (V.i.172), "crownet weeds" (172), and a "weeping brook" (175), but

with the unsavory details of burial, with "crowner's quest law" (22), "my Lady Worm" (88), and the skull of Yorick. Ophelia's beauty has been stripped in the tiring house of death. And now, for the first time, the subject of her guilt is unabashedly addressed: "Is she to be buried in Christian burial when she willfully seeks her own salvation?" (V.i.1-2). Delighted to parade his skill in logic, the obtuse gravedigger examines the difference between drowning oneself "wittingly" and drowning in self-defense. After displaying clever proofs, the clown finally abandons his arguments for the second digger's simple statement of fact: "Will you ha' the truth an't? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out a' Christian burial" (V.i.23-25). Before, we envisioned Ophelia as a helpless victim pulled down by the weight of her garments to a watery death. Now, we are reminded that "the Everlasting [has] fix'd his canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (I.ii.131-32), that suicide is the unpardonable sin.

While the clown's sportiveness brings up the question of guilt, it also points to the limitations of institutions that seek to determine the status of the soul: " . . . and the more pity that great folk should have count'nance in this world to drown or hang themselves, more than their even-Christian" (V.i.226-28). Ophelia has indeed received preferential treatment as the remarks of the "churlish priest" (240) will soon confirm. The clown's witty inversions, however, imply that it does not matter what the "crowner" decides nor where the lady is buried, for she no more than the clever attorney can "circumvent God" (79). As the gravediggers comically

interpret Ophelia's suicide and playfully undermine the power of the crown, they place a new and more distant light on Denmark's tragedy.

We face in this scene not only the death of Ophelia but also the imminent death of Hamlet. From the beginning of the play, we have sympathized with Hamlet's suffering. We have felt his humiliation and anger when facing the truth about his father's murder and his mother's adultery and incest. We also have understood his desire for revenge though we could not morally condone that desire. By assuming the role of "scourge and minister" (III.iv.175), Hamlet has partaken of Denmark's evils. And although we feel his anguish, we know that malice and pride have played a part in his motivations. We feel his responsibility in the deaths of Polonius and Ophelia, and we suspect that he has killed Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as he earlier promised to do. While Hamlet may feel little guilt for these deaths, we must find him more culpable for his lack of remorse. By exempting himself from moral responsibility, Hamlet assumes the stage satirist's characteristic pose as a solitary idealist who stands guiltless amid a throng of sinners.⁶ And like the conventional satirist, whose abusive language and actions betray his pretensions to being a moral healer, Hamlet's savage treatment of Ophelia, his sportive delight in blowing his childhood friends to the moon, and his bitter jests on the corpse of Polonius suggest that Hamlet shares in Denmark's nature, in its rankness and depravity. Now we must prepare in this moment of relative quiet for the final catastrophe and for the loss of the hero. We may sympathize with Hamlet still but must not so closely identify with him that his death seems to be

ours. Since his role is that of the victim and ours is that of the beneficiary of his sacrifice, we accept Hamlet's death with mingled sorrow and relief.

In the graveyard scene, Hamlet contemplates the meaning of his own death, which his unwelcome return to Denmark ensures. Having escaped one murderous plot, Hamlet must expect Claudius to quickly instigate another. In the face of this threat, Hamlet returns to complete his revenge. This he had sworn to do before leaving Denmark. And his arrogant letter to Claudius as well as his unescorted return indicate that he has had no change of heart while at sea. Hamlet's escape from death seems unlikely, and it is this reality that he now faces. He has earlier linked the completion of his task with his own death. What, but the "sleep" of death, allows "enterprises of great pitch and moment" (III.i.85) to "lose the name of action"? (87). Now as Hamlet moves closer to revenge, he senses the nearness of his own destruction. And as he faces his death, we too must realize its inevitability and prepare to release him.

Approaching the grave with his friend Horatio, Hamlet turns his attention to the gravemaker who merrily sings while unearthing skulls. Surprised by this curious fellow, Hamlet asks, "Has this fellow no feeling of his business? 'a sings in grave-making" (V.i.65-66). Hamlet's words express not only the disparity between the gravemaker's levity and the business of death, but also the disparity between the gravemaker's attitude and his own. Hamlet is astonished that a man can take death so casually. The clown's carefree attitude places Hamlet's malice and repugnance in bold

relief; the rustic's business is burial while Hamlet's is killing. The clowns have been burying corpses for thirty years and can speak of death as merrily as they speak of life. Hamlet, on the other hand, is frightened by thoughts of corruption. The Prince too has jested on the idea of human decay. But his jests, unlike the rustic's, are sardonic and bitter. In Act IV, Hamlet taunts his royal prey by refusing to tell him where he has dragged Polonius' body. Polonius is at supper "not where he eats, but where 'a is eaten; a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him" (iii.19-20). Hamlet's words smack of derision and reveal a man who is unreconciled to death. The slaying of Polonius has forced Hamlet to confront the gross reality not only of Polonius' death but also of death as the ultimate verdict of every person's life. Hamlet's sarcasm reveals his inability to accept the cyclical movement of life and death. He recognizes this natural condition but lashes out at its terrors.

The difference between the gravedigger's attitude and that of Hamlet is comparable to the difference in artistic conception between Guyot Marchand's The Dance of Death and Hans Holbein's The Images and Storied Aspects of Death. William M. Ivins, Jr., describes the contrasting moods of the two works:

The wind of the Renaissance blew through its [Holbein's] pages and it has become personal and points the finger. Marchand's Dance is as impersonal as an actuary's tables. And so it was in its time, for it made no one sad. That was the way life was. In the differences between the two, there can be seen the contrast between the two ages.⁷

The gravedigger's acceptance of the natural process is close to the conception of death seen in Marchand's drawings. Here all classes of people are allegorically represented, and the figure of Death leads them merrily away. For Hamlet, however, death is personal. He looks at the bones of the dead and tries to reconstruct the personalities once alive which are now gone. And he seeks to know specifically who will occupy the newly dug grave. His recognition of death's supremacy thus reminds us of the startled figures which Death grips in Holbein's woodcuts. It is this difference in attitude that makes us laugh at the clown's quibbles and makes us shudder at Hamlet's sardonic jests.

Hamlet examines the gravemaker and the disinterred bones for a clarification of meaning and value: "Did these bones cost no more the breeding, but to play at loggats with them?" (V.i.91-92). What, Hamlet asks, is the meaning of life destined to corruption and obscurity? But Hamlet's quest for certainty is met only with equivocation and the smell of decay. In Death's hollow gaze, however, lies the test of faith. Hamlet was earlier asked by his mother to accept the lesson of death: "Thou know'st 'tis common, all that lives must die, / Passing through nature to eternity" (I.ii.72-73). Now the grave, in all its horror, as it denies Hamlet's plea for assurance, extends the challenge of faith.

In questioning the gravemaker, Hamlet finds for the first time a wit more potent than his own. Hamlet asks the gravemaker a simple question "whose grave's this, sirra?" (V.i.117-18). He receives in return the perplexing reply: "Mine, sir" (119). Challenged by the

obscure answer, the Prince indulges in a playful contest of wits, the object on his side being to force the rustic to a direct reply. The gravedigger, nevertheless, resists Hamlet's demand for clarity, stating at last that he digs the grave neither for a man nor for a woman, but rather for "one that was a woman, sir, but, rest her soul she's dead" (V.i.135-36). The woman's identity, her beauty and even her sex, the rustic implies, are not important, for she is now simply one of the anonymous dead. The reality of death's destruction of personal identity is brought home. And like the bones and skulls that torture Hamlet's mind, the gravemaker's remarks Hamlet keenly feels: "By the Lord, Horatio, this three years I have took note of it, the age is grown so pick'd that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, he galls his kibe" (V.i.138-41). The gravemaker personifies the chaotic power of death itself. By the force of his wit, he overturns Hamlet's expectations as casually as he dashes a hollow skull to the ground. The gravedigger's implicit satire forces Hamlet into greater isolation while his gaiety reminds us of the infinite possibilities for renewal that extend beyond Hamlet's death.

Death's mockery becomes still more powerful when the gravedigger throws Yorick's skull to Hamlet's feet. The clown jocularly curses the skull: "A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! 'a pour'd a flagon of Rhenish on my head once" (V.i.179-80). Hamlet, in contrast, tries to recapture the image of the jester. Remembering his own playful rides as a child upon the fool's back, Hamlet exclaims, "how abhorr'd in my imagination it is! my gorge rises at it" (V.i.187). Hamlet

then visualizes the face and examines the individual attributes which made him Yorick: "Here hung those lips that I have kiss'd I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?" (V.i.188-91). As Hamlet studies Yorick's skull, we recognize the Prince's intense inwardness and melancholy. As Bridget Gellert aptly notes, Hamlet takes the characteristic pose of the iconographic figure of Melancholy who holds a skull and broods while observing it.⁸ The gravemaker's merriment places in stark relief Hamlet's isolation and sadness: the rustic does not allow speculation to interfere with activity but performs the job that is his to do and in this way participates in life. Although the jester's skull now has not a single gibe to mock its own grinning, it scoffs at Hamlet in a way he does not yet understand. The irony surrounding Hamlet's demand, "Now get you to my lady's chamber" (V.i.192-93) suggests the cruelest of Death's jokes. For Ophelia, Hamlet's former love, takes no more delight in her beauty and has no use for cosmetics or finery. Even Hamlet's satiric outbursts, such as the one he presently indulges in, cannot affect her anymore. Yorick's skull mirrors Ophelia in a more literal way than Hamlet knows, and just as the skull mocks Hamlet's ignorance, so it mirrors him.

Ophelia's grave, the skull of Yorick and the incorrigible gravedigger scorn the glory of Hamlet's enterprise. We weigh the finality of death against Hamlet's desire for personal revenge, and find his pride to be hollow and his hate impotent. Honor indeed seems as Falstaff would say, "a mere scutcheon" (I Henry IV,

V.i.140), a vain and empty "word" (134). Our understanding is more complete than Hamlet's own, for we see as he does not that he has been trapped by his own device. The mousetrap set for Claudius has clamped its iron jaws on Hamlet. The play of Gonzago, designed by Hamlet to "catch the conscience of the king" (II.ii.605), also entraps the inventor. The play ensnares Hamlet not because he displays conscience, but rather because he abandons it. Once assured that the ghost's story is true, Hamlet gives himself over to a cruel lust for vengeance:

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
 When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
 Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood,
 And do such bitter business as the day
 Would quake to look on. . . .

(III.ii.388-92)

On the battlement, the ghost had warned Hamlet not to taint his mind, but the satanic imagery of Hamlet's soliloquy indicates that Hamlet's mind is indeed contaminated.

A comparison of Shakespeare's Hamlet with the hero of the anonymous German play Der Bestrafte Brudermord underscores the extreme cruelty of Hamlet's revenge. Explaining his reason for staging a play, the German Hamlet tells the story of a woman who murdered her husband and for nine years lives with the secret. One day, while watching a tragedy whose story parallels her own, she openly confesses her crime. Although the woman must die for her deed, her soul, the passage implies, is saved. She deeply repents, receives holy unction, gives her body in true contrition to the

executioner, and commends her soul to God. Hamlet then exclaims, "Oh that my uncle-teacher would thus take it to heart if he has committed this crime!"⁹ The emphasis on salvation in this hero's speech points to a distinction between two types of revenge: that of the German Hamlet, who seeks merely the death of the offender, and that of Shakespeare's Hamlet, who seeks not only the culprit's death but also the damnation of his soul. The prayer scene, which is not found in Saxo, Belleforest or in Der Bestrafte Brudermord, seems a deliberate attempt by Shakespeare to show the blackness of Hamlet's heart.¹⁰ Hamlet wants to kill Claudius at such a moment that "his heels will kick at Heaven" (III.iii.93). Hamlet does not act the part of God's agent but tries to circumvent God's mercy. Heaven will forgive a penitent sinner, but Hamlet will not. He desires personal vengeance, not "hire and salary" (III.iii.79), and he will "couple hell" (I.v.93) to get it.

As the scene moves towards its climax in the mistaken slaying of Polonius, the identification between Hamlet and Claudius crystalizes. We notice in the play-within-the-play a strange overlaying of the crime of Claudius and the revenge of Hamlet. Gonzago, though murdered in the same manner as King Hamlet, is not murdered by a brother, as we would expect, but rather by his nephew. By incorporating this difference in the enactment of Claudius' murder, Hamlet taunts the King with his evil act, threatens him with murder, and tempts him to further crime. Hamlet, like Claudius, seems affected by the staging of the crimes. His rage surges as he sees the reenactment of the horrible death of his

father, and he must also feel humiliated by the presentation of his own revenge. Like the player's recitation of the death of Priam that chastened Hamlet for his inaction, Hamlet must see in the scene's cunning a reminder of his own lack of passionate involvement. Hamlet's verbal savagery too enhances his bitterness and rage. As he toys with his victims, he feels a surge of power, a power that he will soon unleash in murder. This convergence of crimes in *The Mousetrap* links the murder by Claudius and the revenge of Hamlet closely in our minds. The prayer scene furthers this identification, for like Claudius who cut off his brother's life in the fullness of his sins, "Unhous'led, disappointed, unanel'd" (I.v.77), Hamlet will wait to slay Claudius when he is "drunk asleep, or in his rage, / Or in th' incestious pleasure of his bed. . . ." (III.iii.89-90). There is no mysterious motive, such as a repugnance for the deed of murder, that stays Hamlet's sword, but the desire to damn a human soul. And Hamlet, grasping the next opportunity, blindly thrusts his rapier through the arras, grotesquely shouting, "A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!" (III.iv.23). His exclamation, though meant to signal Claudius' entrapment, in fact marks Hamlet's. At this moment, Denmark's guilt falls on the shoulders of Hamlet. For he has symbolically slain the King. While we identify with Hamlet through the first acts of the play, sympathizing with his grief and frustration, we now begin to separate ourselves from him, because his attempt at regicide and his callous reaction to Polonius' death are almost as abhorrent as was Claudius' crime against King Hamlet. The Prince has crossed the line that he trod for so long, becoming now

the culprit and revenger. He is thus exiled from Denmark as he is exiled from our sympathies. And when he returns it will be to meet his own death, absolving Denmark's guilt and our own. Hamlet's killing of Claudius' comic double, the ridiculous Machiavel, is an ironic and playful twist, a satiric comment on Hamlet's vendetta. Hamlet's attempt upon the King's life issues only in the death of this foolish old man. It is indeed "the sport to have the engineer / Hoist with his own petar" (III.iv.206-07). And Hamlet by this savage deed has blown himself to the moon.

Now as Hamlet exchanges words with the gravemaker, he seems almost like Ophelia at her death a creature "incapable of [its] own distress" (IV.viii.178). For Hamlet does not realize that the grave he observes is Ophelia's and that all hope for a reconciliation of their love has passed. The gravemaker's song reinforces the pathos and the irony of Hamlet's isolation. The lyrics describe an old man, who though amorous in his prime, must now renounce the joys of love. Unlike the ancient, who accepts each of life's roles in its due season, Hamlet has renounced love in his youth. Upon the battlement, Hamlet erased from his tables all fond remembrances in order to inscribe there his oath of revenge. Now the gaping grave tells us that love renounces Hamlet, for the Prince has traveled too far on his bloody course to reclaim the time. Hamlet's attempt on Claudius' life has served only to bring about the death of an innocent girl, and her death and her father's will in turn secure his own.

As we watch Hamlet in the graveyard, we respond to him with mingled pity and disgust. We feel for Hamlet as we might for a helpless rat entrapped by its own rapacious, though natural, appetite. Measure for Measure's Claudio captures this ambivalent reaction of repulsion and sympathy when admitting his own weakness: "Our natures do pursue, / Like rats that ravin down their proper bane, / A thirsty evil, and when we drink we die" (I.ii.128-30). Here, Claudio both denigrates and pities himself; in Hamlet, we both disdain and pity the Prince. The gravemakers, the skulls, and the grave underscore Hamlet's natural weakness, for death in Christian thought is the physical equivalent of sin. And just as the death relics and the gravediggers point to Hamlet's natural propensity to sin, they show us our mortal kinship to Hamlet, thus furthering our identification with him. The lesson of death, however, as it promotes identification also becomes a vehicle for separation: it instructs us to faith and patience, to an acceptance of the coming catastrophe. As we accept this call to faith, we sense our difference from Hamlet and prepare to release him. Hamlet, though calmer and more composed in Act V than previously, demonstrates neither patience nor faith. Hamlet's relative passivity is a function of his dramatic role rather than a sign of his conversion.

Throughout the play, Hamlet's role is dramatic scapegoat. This role, however, involves two parts: first the assumption of guilt, and secondly, the sacrifice itself. The assumption of guilt for Hamlet includes both suffering and acting as scourge. By suffering, Hamlet induces our sympathy and by issuing verbal and physical abuse

he absorbs our guilt. Denmark's ills do not originate with Hamlet. They begin with the sins of Claudius and Gertrude. Fratricide, adultery, and incest are the acts that first contaminate Denmark. By accepting the role of scourge, Hamlet moves by degrees to the center of the infested state. His journey to this center is not direct, for Hamlet first puts on, not the mantle of a king, but the habit of a jester. His motive for this antic pose is vague. In Saxo Grammaticus' Historiae Danicae, the hero's reason for pretending to be mad is clear. The entire kingdom knows that the reigning king has killed his brother, and Amleth, the hero, feigns madness to hide his desire for revenge. In Shakespeare, however, Claudius' murder is not publicly known, and Hamlet's "madness" only serves to arouse the King's suspicions. The antic disposition, while it may lack motivation, serves an essential dramatic purpose. Hamlet's antic mask is part of his function as scourge. As satiric buffoon, Hamlet uses his wit like a surgeon's knife to cut out the cancer of Denmark. Hamlet abuses the court and by doing so encourages his victims to further foolishness. In Polonius' presence, for example, Hamlet often refers obliquely to Ophelia and so tempts the old man to further investigate his theory of Hamlet's love-madness. With Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, however, Hamlet quibbles on the subject of ambition and feeds their theory that Hamlet's madness springs from envy. At the play-within-the-play, Hamlet's abuse becomes all inclusive. He toys with Polonius, Ophelia, Gertrude, and most importantly the King. By nettling Claudius' conscience and issuing veiled threats, Hamlet compels the King to choose between abdication

and a second murder to secure his life and reign. Alvin Kernan explains that the satirist's role is frequently that of a tempter: "He leads his victims on and encourages them in their foolishness only to reveal them for what they are and scourge them."¹² When Hamlet condemns the court, he implicates himself. His judgments may be correct, but his harsh words reveal his own savagery and intransigence.

Hamlet's role of scourge also bears magical implications. Enid Welsford describes the function of abuse in assuring good luck. She explains that the fear of the sin of presumption accounts for the fool's abuse. A malign power, she states, is felt to exist in "a vague, undefined way suffused throughout the universe." One may attract this "queer cosmic jealousy" by enjoying popularity or by praising oneself. Conversely, to avoid this unwanted attention, one must "depreciate oneself or be mocked by other people."¹³ As Hamlet wages war against humanity, he underscores our own grotesqueness. He chastizes the foolishness of old men, the vanity of women, the affectations of courtiers, and the viciousness of statesmen. By ridiculing human folly, Hamlet dissuades us from the sin of "hubris," thus shielding us from the tragedy which lies ahead.

As antic, Hamlet plays an equivocal role in relation to the realm's center. By mocking the King and the court, he flirts with the assumption of power. He holds up a refracted mirror that shows the ephemeral quality of the order upon which the kingdom stands. Like a court jester, Hamlet both is and is not the center that he reflects. The court jester's finest joke upon the king is after all

to remind him that he is merely mortal and like himself a fool. But if the king is the fool, then it follows that the fool is the king. Hamlet is King. While Hamlet discredits Denmark's facade of order, and plays with the idea of usurping power, he remains for a time distinct from the center. According to William Willeford, the jester's position of "punctum indifferens" accounts for Hamlet's inability to effect a quick revenge.¹⁴ The abusive buffoon is indeed more prone to verbalizing threats than to discharging deeds. Yet by putting on an antic disposition, Hamlet begins to establish himself as the mock king who must eventually die. The brutal slaying of Polonius marks the completion of this process. At this point Hamlet leaves the stage. When he returns, it is to fulfill another role, that of the sacrificial victim. Hamlet's intention to kill Claudius does not change. There is merely a change in emphasis rather than in direction. Hamlet does not accept the Christian lesson of the skull as some critics believe.¹⁵ His actions both at Ophelia's grave and at the castle make this clear. When Hamlet begins to trace the fate of Alexander in the dust, Horatio voices his concern: "'twere to consider too curiously, to consider so" (V.i.205-06). Horatio seems aware that Hamlet has not drawn from his speculations the traditional Christian moral, but is indulging in morbidity for its own sake. Indeed the verse that ends Hamlet's imaginative journey in search of Alexander holds the same bitterness as his earlier jests:

Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

O that the earth which kept the world in awe
Should patch a wall t' expel the winter's flaw!

(213-16)

Hamlet splashes the traditional elegaic lament of the classical Ubi Sunt with acidic humor. His words, though less violent than his former quips on Polonius' corpse, hold a similar acerbity. The nursery rhyme rhythm and tedious coupleting suggest that the speaker is melancholic and yet unreconciled to death.

An approaching funeral breaks Hamlet's introspective mood. As he watches the procession, Hamlet soon learns that the corpse which the mourners have come to bury is that of "fair Ophelia." Angered by Laertes' histrionic display, Hamlet steps forward to announce his presence. Elizabethans would have recognized in Hamlet's erratic shift in mood the characteristic volatility of a melancholic disposition. Hamlet experienced extremities of humor before leaving Denmark. We remember, for example, his abrupt change from quiet introspection in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy to cruel vehemence in the nunnery scene that follows. Hamlet's quarrel with Laertes at the grave suggests that Hamlet is still a victim of his own intolerance. His rejection of the skull's challenge to patience and faith pulls him into the kingdom's malignant vortex. As Hamlet leaps in or near the grave, shouting "This is I, / Hamlet the Dane!" (257-58), he again merges in our thoughts with Claudius. By these words, Hamlet asserts his own identity as King and assumes his place at the spiritual center of Denmark. He affirms in a single gesture his defiance of Claudius and his willingness to suffer the dreadful

consequences of revenge. The knowledge of Ophelia's death confirms for Hamlet, as it does for us, the inevitability of his death. The wheels of retribution have been turning in Hamlet's absence, and now the King has only to "put the matter to the present push" (295). While Hamlet's leap towards Ophelia's grave signifies his resignation to death, his action simultaneously bears the ritual connotation of fertility. And Ophelia's associations with water reinforce this symbolism. "To the mythopoeic mind," explains Walter Otto, "water is the element in which the primal mysteries of all life dwell. Birth and death, past, present, and future interwine their dances here."¹⁶ Again the grave becomes an image of death and renewal. The gravedigger's merriment has told us that there is life and happiness among the common people, and Hamlet's passionate gesture promises new hope for the realm.

Though Hamlet momentarily engages in heated confrontation, he seems for the most part calmer since his return to Denmark. His role as aggressive scourge has become subordinate to that of a passive victim. The gravedigger's humor readies us for this new emphasis. The abuser is now abused, the court jester mocked by a more powerful wit than his own. And we are invited to celebrate the freedom that Hamlet's death will ensure. Saturnalian gaiety and the conflict at the grave then give way to a period of calm in which we are reminded that Providence sanctions the fall of Claudius and the Prince's death. By speaking of Christian Providence in scene ii, Hamlet allows us to see a cosmic design that gives positive significance to his rash and impetuous actions. Hamlet's personal vendetta, though

it defies God's authority as judge and executioner, is nonetheless used by Heaven to cleanse the corruption of the state and to bring it to newness again. This scene culminates in the sacrifice itself and the apotheosis of the ritual king. At the play's close, Laertes forgives Hamlet for his father's death and for his own, Horatio describes Hamlet's heart as "noble" and invokes angels to sing him to his rest, and Fortinbras offers Hamlet a soldier's funeral in honor of the greatness he would have achieved had he lived to reign. Hamlet is lifted to a new status not because of his goodness, but because his personal revenge ironically serves to enfranchise the land. The adulation of the dead Prince parallels the transformation of the sacrificial king into a god. It signifies the people's gratitude to the man who has suffered and died so that they might live. The memory of the dead hero serves also as a stimulant for reintegrating the people. And it is expressly for this reason, to tell the story of Hamlet, that Horatio lives. Laughter, emanating from Ophelia's grave, reverberates in Horatio's final address. It is laughter celebrating Hamlet's triumph (his apotheosis in fame) and ours (our freedom and spiritual renewal). Sensing an alternative to death in the gravedigger's cheer and in his lesson of humility and faith, we have escaped the calamity of Denmark. Our spiritual growth has enabled us to separate from Hamlet, to realize his deficiency and leave him behind. Hamlet, however, has paid for our enlightenment with his life, and for this, we, like Horatio, will perpetuate his name by interpreting and revitalizing the story of the Prince.

Notes

¹Weisinger, p. 268.

²Weisinger, p. 42.

³Stegemeier, p. 7.

⁴See notes for introduction, number 30.

⁵Susan Snyder, The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello and King Lear (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979), p. 126.

⁶Alvin Kernan, The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959), p. 45. Kernan explains that Chrisogonus of Marston's Histriomatrix, in the common way of all satirists, places himself "in the best possible moral light." But Chrisogonus' actions betray him "as a vain pedant devoid of common sense." Kernan also sees in Feliche of Marston's Antonio and Mellida a clear discrepancy between the satirist's stoic pretensions and the sadistic delight he takes in scourging his victims (p. 209).

⁷William M. Ivins, introd., The Dance of Death: Printed at Paris in 1490, by Guyot Marchand, A reproduction made from the copy in the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress, 1946.

⁸Bridget Gellert, "The Iconography of Melancholy in the Graveyard Scene of Hamlet," Studies in Philology, 67 (1970), 59.

⁹Der Bestrafte Brudermord, trans. G. Archer in Major Tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth of ed. Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources, VII, p. 141.

¹⁰Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources, VII, pp. 38-39. Bullough states that neither in Saxo nor in Belleforest does the evil uncle show signs of remorse. The prayer scene, he suggests, may have come from the lost Ur-Hamlet, for "a Kydian hero would surely put off the killing of his enemy, not out of religious scruples, but to make sure of damning his soul." Bullough also quotes Gentillet who says that vengeful Italians "seek in slaying the bodie to damne the soule, if they could."

¹¹The horror which the idea of sudden death, the mors improvisa, evoked for the renaissance is difficult for us today to conceive. According to the popular Ars Moriendi, the dying person even under the best of circumstances, faces the most grueling battle imaginable. The mere appearance of the hideous demons which come to tempt his soul is enough to throw Moriens headlong to despair. Absolution, meditation and prayers help the dying person to walk the thin line between loss of hope and presumption. Without these

spiritual comforts, however, the devil's chances of winning the soul are greatly increased. For further information on the fear of sudden death see Aries, pp. 10-13, 108, 119.

¹²Kernan, p. 211.

¹³Enid Welsford, p. 66.

¹⁴William Willeford, p. 196. For more information on the relationship between the fool and the king, see Willeford's chapter entitled "The Fool, the Boundary and the Center," pp. 129-147.

¹⁵Eleanor Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge (Stanford, California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 217-237.

¹⁶Walter Otto, Dionysus: Myth and Cult, trans. Robert B. Palmer (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1965), p. 161.

CHAPTER IX
"JOY OF THE WORM":
REDEEMING PLAY IN SHAKESPEARE'S ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

When Cleopatra greets the rustic bearing the "pretty worm of Nilus," we sense the irony of her situation, for Cleopatra is the descendant of royal kings, the former lover of Julius Caesar, Cneius Pompey, and Mark Antony, a personification of Egypt's fecundity and majesty, and the one-time center of contention between the powers of the Roman world. Now as she faces death, it seems unsuitable that death's usher should be such a poor and foolish rustic. Cleopatra too senses this disparity when she says, "What poor an instrument / May do a noble deed: He brings me liberty" (V.ii.237). By giving her the serpent of Nile, the rustic releases Cleopatra from Caesar's tyranny. In a different way the rustic helps us, the audience, gain liberty as well, bringing us not a deadly asp, but rejuvenating laughter. As in Hamlet's gravemaker scene, comic-tragic blending here allows comic release. "Comic release," signifies more than is usually meant by the term--a brief relaxing of tensions. It implies, in addition, our release of the tragic scapegoat. Laughter helps us to sever our emotional bond with Cleopatra and give her up to death. Although Cleopatra must die, we are encouraged to live by the clown's gaiety, and our lives will be enriched by our contact with

the elemental passions of the tragic pair and by our heightened sense of what it means to be mortal.

From the decisive battle of Actium in Act III to the scene of Antony's death in Act IV, scene xv, the play's action tends to alienate Cleopatra from our sympathies. Cleopatra's cowardly flight from Actium, her false message to Antony of her death, and her refusal to open the passageway of her monument for the dying hero's entry are all actions suggesting that the Queen's love for Antony is a less compelling motive than is self-adoration. Commentaries on her actions by other characters also prompt us to question her honesty. For example, Enobarbus' interpretation of her interview with Thidias, "Sir, sir, thou Antony art so leaky / That we must leave thee to thy sinking, for / Thy dearest quit thee" (III.xiii.63-64, emphasis mine) as well as Antony's accusations of betrayal following the wholesale desertion of his army, "This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me" (IV.xii.10) linger in our minds, posing doubts, long after Antony becomes convinced of Cleopatra's fidelity.

Janet Adelman, in The Common Liar, comments on the many commentaries in the play, explaining that unlike the other major tragedies which prompt us to share the central protagonist's world view, Antony and Cleopatra presents us with many radically different, often irreconcilable perspectives. And this variety of perspectives, Adelman explains, "frequently militate[s] against the play's tragic effect."¹ If then we are to experience tragic joy at Cleopatra's death, Cleopatra must come once more into our favor, for only through identification can we transfer to her our guilt.

Act V, scene ii serves to adjust our perception of Cleopatra and thus to arouse our pity. As Cleopatra loses her earthly power she gains an affective power; as she is driven into physical isolation, she simultaneously moves to the center of our sympathies. The Roman soldiers' brutal capture of Cleopatra, followed by Proculeius' self-congratulatory remark, "you see how easily she may be surpris'd" (V.ii.35), heightens our awareness of Cleopatra's isolation and helplessness. Caesar's men, like cunning, unscrupulous hunters, have tracked and ensnared their Egyptian quarry. Their bold abuse of decorum, by placing in relief the sanctity of majesty, evokes our compassion for the defenseless Queen. Amazed at the Roman's outrageous effrontery, Iras and Charmian cry, "Royal Queen!" and "O Cleopatra! thou art taken Queen" (V.ii.37-38, emphasis mine). Both utterances point to the Roman's barbaric insult to royalty. The clown then is not the first to disrupt decorum but comes as the final messenger, presaging Cleopatra's doom. His breach of decorum is not cloaked like Proculeius' with generous words and false assurances; he comes instead unmasked, an honest ambassador of death.

The subject of decorum is broached by Iras in the opening act when she playfully begs Isis to send Alexas a promiscuous wife, "for, as it is a heart-breaking to see a handsome man loose-wiv'd, so it is a deadly sorrow to behold a foul knave uncuckolded; therefore, dear Isis, keep decorum, and fortune him accordingly!" (V.ii.71-73). It is fitting that the strict application of rules of decorum be applied to one who flagrantly abuses propriety, and it is laughable that decorum alone should prove the knave's undoing. We enjoy Iras' plea

for poetic justice just as we enjoyed the Duke's sentencing of the lecherous scoundrel Lucio at the end of Measure for Measure: "good my lord, do not recompense me in making me a cuckold" (V.i.16-17). Lucio's punishment is essentially comic for Lucio becomes the substitute scapegoat that is important if not essential to the play's happy ending. Iras' statement, however, has tragic as well as comic implications. We laugh at the knave Alexas but are disturbed by the gross impropriety of the powerful Roman Antony, who has turned away the messenger of Caesar to appease and amuse his lover: "No messenger but thine . . . / To-night we'll wander through the streets and note / The qualities of people" (I.i.52-54). Unlike Alexas and his promiscuous, though as yet unrealized, wife, Antony and Cleopatra have the power to embroil the world in their domestic scandal. As the world partakes of their license, the rules of order and hierarchy, which have supported their authority, are slowly eradicated. Antony and Cleopatra's abuses, their lies and their inconstancy, thus culminate in the Roman infraction of order, the subjugating of ancient Egypt and its sovereign. While Act I centers on the playful though dangerous improprieties of Antony and Cleopatra, Act V emphasizes the cruel abuses of Caesar. Carnival has at last given way to anarchy. Aware of the discrepancy between the courteous manners of her captors and the grim reality of her defeat, Cleopatra sardonically says what she would ask of Caesar: "If your master / Would have a queen his beggar, you must tell him / That majesty to keep decorum, must / No less beg than a kingdom" (V.i.15-18). Cleopatra's words mock Caesar's pretended generosity.

By forcing a queen to beg, Caesar has already violated decorum, and his gestures of kindness do not obscure the reality of this transgression. Now brought to bay, Cleopatra reacts desperately but is prevented from ending her life by Proculeius. Proculeius, as Cleopatra points out, extends royalty less pity than one should show a dog, "What, of death too, / That rids our dogs of languish" (V.ii.41-42). Although Cleopatra has in the former acts been foolish, manipulative, and false, she seems at this moment not unlike Lear on the heath, who tormented by his daughters' abuse cries out that he is one "more sinn'd against than sinning" (III.ii.59). The images in Cleopatra's defiant outburst, as they express her anguish, suggest her sacrificial role:

Shall they hoist me up,
And show me to the shouting varlotry
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me! rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark-nak'd, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorring! rather make
My country's high pyramides my gibbet
And hang me up in chains?

(V.ii.55-62)

Cleopatra is to serve as a sacrificial victim for both Caesar and us. Caesar wishes to display her in his Roman triumph, degrading her for the sake of the Roman Peace. Although Cleopatra denies him this histrionic display, her death consolidates Caesar's power and assures Rome's stability. We too will use Cleopatra for our peace, figuratively hanging her on the high pyramids in chains. And like Caesar's mixture of relief and regret when hearing of Antony's death,

we at Cleopatra's will also come to "lament our most persisted deeds" (V.i.29).

Entrapped like an animal in her monument (V.ii), Cleopatra ironically appears more royal than at any previous time. As she weeps for Antony and bravely prepares herself to die, we sense the nobility and grandeur of Egypt's queen, observing at last the majestic creature that Enobarbus describes in Act II, scene ii, when he recounts her journey down the river Cydnus. Duncan Harris in "Again for Cydnus" explains that this final scene "is the delayed presentation of Enobarbus' vision of Cleopatra's infinite variety."² Cleopatra contributes to her sublime metamorphosis by allowing her imagination free play. She would immortalize Antony, praising him as a Jove: "His face was as the heav'ns, and therein stuck / A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted / The little O, th' earth" (V.ii.79-80). Her attempt "to vie strange forms of fancy" (V.ii.97-98), however, does more to transform her in our minds than to change our impression of Antony. For like Dolabella, we see Cleopatra's grief as an image of her own greatness: "Your loss is as yourself, great; and you bear it / As answering to the weight" (V.ii.101-02). Expressing her sorrow in cosmic terms, Cleopatra seems an archetypal figure of feminine suffering. And we respond to her compassionately as we would respond to the goddess Isis grieving for her dead lover Osiris. So magnificent is Cleopatra as she mourns Antony's death and contemplates her own that we risk submitting ourselves completely to her and losing ourselves in her death. Indeed, we suspend many of our negative feelings towards her,

momentarily forgetting the wrangling, manipulative queen of the first four acts who subjugates Antony's will to her own. And we likewise disregard her selfishness, duplicity, and concupiscence.

Unlike Antony, however, we may appreciate Cleopatra's majesty without sacrificing our lives. We may escape the death awaiting those who submit fully to her "strong toil of grace" (V.ii.347). The clown helps us to effect our escape first by perfecting our identification with the Queen and then by distracting us from her. When the rustic first comes into view, he heightens our sympathy for Cleopatra, for death which seemed in her reveries ethereal and inviting now appears as real and repugnant as the serpents that writhe beneath the figs. Seeing the rustic, Cleopatra too senses death's substantiality as she conforms her will to her new circumstance: "now from head to foot / I am marble-constant; now the fleeting moon / No planet is mine" (V.ii.239-41). Death, like Cleopatra's determination, now possesses the solidity and the palpability of marble. Like all fools, the rustic lacks a stable ego-structure, a centeredness of direction and will, and so places in relief Cleopatra's firm resolve, prompting us to pity her even more. The rustic, however, not only emphasizes through contrast the Queen's newly acquired self-possession, but also reflects her former irrationality, her affinity with Luna, "the fleeting moon," which is also his own astrological deity and a symbol of mortality. As reflectory as the moon, the fool includes us also in his spacious looking-glass. And our image coalesces with Cleopatra's as we sense and fear our own death and hers. Thus the identification between

Cleopatra, the tragic scapegoat, and us, the beneficiaries of her sacrifice, is for a brief moment complete.

But just as the rustic draws us towards the doomed heroine, he also offers us laughter, the vehicle for our escape. The clown's jests pierce the illusion of Cleopatra's mystical apotheosis, helping us to dissociate ourselves from the doomed heroine. The odd appearance of the rustic first awakens us to the theatricality of the play itself, for he, like all clowns, stands partly within and partly outside the drama. Incongruous with the tragic scene, the rustic reminds us, as Cleopatra has moments earlier, that we are watching an actor "boy [her] greatness" (V.ii.220). As the clown's presence points to the play's artifice, it distances us from Cleopatra, reminding us that we are merely theatre-goers watching an actor play the role of the famous and infamous Queen.

The rustic provides distance not only by puncturing the play's illusion of reality but also by restoring in part our earlier, more critical perspective. The clown, explains Harold Fisch, "makes death real, showing it to us in a handful of dust."³ After her capture by Caesar's soldiers, Cleopatra appealed to death to take her for her immense value: "Where art thou, death? / Come higher, come! Come, come, and take a queen / Worth many babes and beggars" (V.ii.46-47). To Antony, Caesar, and us, she may be so esteemed, but to the Mighty Leveller's comic emissary she is a mere statistic: "For in every ten that the gods make the devils mar five" (V.ii.76-78). Like the jovial figures of death in Holbein's Dance of Death, who compel queens as well as paupers to dance, this clown

cares nothing for Cleopatra's grandeur but sports with her freely as an equal. His familiarity mocks Cleopatra's beauty and charm as it undermines her visions of immortal bliss in Antony's arms. The rustic's description of the death of the woman who, bitten "no longer than yesterday," makes "a good report o' th' worm" (V.ii.255) generalizes Cleopatra's predicament. He thereby diminishes for an instant the stature of the Queen. For Cleopatra, the clown implies, will be like the many men and women before her who have died from the aspic's poison. Like the porter's shrinking of Macbeth to the stature of the farmer, the equivocator, and the tailor who have chosen "the primrose way to th' everlasting bonfire" (II.iii.19), the rustic puts Egypt's Queen among the many who have been corrupted by the phallic asp. The rustic thus places Cleopatra in a context that is neither historical nor mythical, but moral. His warning that "the worm is not to be trusted but in the keeping of wise people" underscores the Queen's supreme folly.

The rustic, however, does not completely destroy the aura of majesty surrounding Cleopatra, but reminds us of what we had almost forgotten, Cleopatra's fallibility and her humanity. We now see Cleopatra in a double light: she is both Folly incarnate and a second Isis. This paradox is crucial to her role as tragic scapegoat, for to bear our guilt she must share in what is evil and destructive, and to serve as a link between us and the sublime she must partake of what is creative and good. Humor helps us to reconcile this contradiction, for it, like death, dissolves boundaries of logic, allowing opposites to fuse. The serpent's bite,

explains the rustic, is "immortal: those that do die of it do seldom or never recover" (V.ii.247-48). The rustic here suggests the paradox at the center of tragedy. Death, the rustic's quibble implies, is everlasting. Thus his words deride Cleopatra's "immortal longings." They remind us that the wages of sin are death, and that few who submit to lust escape eternal damnation. But the clown's mistaken use of "immortal" for "mortal" undercuts these implications as well, for the word "immortal" literally means "not death"; thus the serpent's bite is "not death" or rather is "life." The serpent's biting is then both death and life. This, of course, is purest nonsense, but non-sense is at the center of the paradox of death and regeneration, the paradox of tragedy itself.

Cleopatra's words to Iras and Charmian just before the rustic's arrival, introduce the moral perspective and the playful tone of the interview that follows: "I'll give thee leave / To play till doomsday" (V.ii.231-32). The blissful shades of a pagan paradise are momentarily supplanted by the Christian awareness of judgment. When their final duty is performed, dressing Cleopatra in the likeness of Isis, the handmaidens will be dismissed from duty and given permission by their Queen to play. Charmian later completes this idea of release from service when straightening her dead mistress' crown: "Your crown's awry, / I'll mend it, and then play" (V.vii.318-19). Like Charmian, we also in this final act trim the Queen's crooked diadem and accept our challenge to play. We note Cleopatra's turpitude and folly, polish her tarnished image, and then engage in the rustic's foolishness. William Willeford remarks on the

chaos that often erupts in the presence of the fool and on the audience's participation in his escape from harm. The fool, he explains, often "releases a kind of foolish magic and then escapes the consequences of the magic he release[s]." Thus "in being fooled we are drawn into a provisional identity with the fool who escapes it."⁴ In Antony and Cleopatra, however, chaos does not come as a result of the clown, but rather the clown comes as a consequence and a sign of chaos. The many instances of indecorum climaxing in the fool's appearance indicate this collapsing order which has Cleopatra as its center. The rustic's escape from danger is also our own, for as we share in his clowning, seeing our own reflection in his image, we momentarily coalesce with the fool. We break from Cleopatra's bewitching embrace and enter the fool's circle of irresponsible freedom. Our burden of mortal and moral responsibility we give to the doomed heroine and celebrate our escape with saturnalian delight.

When Cleopatra calls the rustic her liberator, we remember a corresponding moment, which may illuminate more fully the meaning of Cleopatra's interview with the rustic in her hour before death. Prior to the rustic's arrival, Cleopatra entertains another visitor, the winner of the world's lottery, Octavius Caesar. Caesar, however, with all the power of the world does not come to Cleopatra's relief as does the rustic, but tightens the security of her prison by ordering his guards to protect her against herself and against escape. As we examine the encounter between Cleopatra and Octavius, we see clearly the polarities distinguishing the two characters, and subsequently the hiatus between East and West.

In the previous acts, we have seen Caesar's coolly calculated political stratagems. In Act II, we see him use his sister Octavia as a bond between Antony and himself, a "hoop" which "should hold us staunch from edge to edge / A' th' world . . . " (II.ii.115-16). Caesar knows that Antony had abandoned Fulvia for his Egyptian love, and he also knows that his most recent messenger to Antony was turned away because the two lovers had chosen to eclipse the Roman world by their embrace. Yet realizing that Octavia is the one instrument which may solidify the western world, Caesar jeopardizes her happiness and honor by offering her in marriage to Antony. Caesar again displays his close attention to political necessity when he denies Lepidus "rivality." Eros tells us of Caesar's use of Lepidus in the wars against Pompey and of Caesar's subsequent unwillingness to allow Lepidus to share in the glory of the action. According to Eros, Caesar accuses Lepidus of treason, strips him of his equal rights as a member of the triumvirate and imprisons him.

After the battle of Actium, Caesar again demonstrates his unscrupulous political sense. Caesar sends Cleopatra word that he will give her freedom and the circle of the Ptolomies if she will but hand him Antony. We know that Caesar dislikes Cleopatra and resents her power over Antony, the power that can beckon Antony from Octavia's house. Yet Caesar realizes that the real threat to his power is not Cleopatra, but Antony, and that Antony's capture is more sure if it is done surreptitiously rather than in battle. After Antony's suicide, we then hear Caesar instruct Proculeius to comfort Cleopatra, and we now understand how cautious and clever Caesar can

be. For his intentions are to use the Egyptian Queen for his Roman triumph, and he does not wish to have his designs spoiled by her untimely suicide.

Now when we view Caesar in Cleopatra's monument, we measure the calculated composure of Caesar against the immense vitality of the Queen, and we realize just how "paltry" it is to be Caesar even at the height of conquest, and how remarkable to be Cleopatra. When Caesar first enters the monument, Cleopatra kneels before him as though submissive to the turn of fate and to her conquerer. We see in this gesture the irony of Caesar's conquest, for the spirit of Cleopatra cannot be subdued by the hand of the Roman. We recall Enobarbus' description of her, "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety" (II.ii.234-35). Cleopatra's majesty, like her beauty, is not subject to time or to circumstances.

She speaks politely to Caesar and listens attentively to his vacuous promises to use her fairly and honorably. But when Seleucus dares to speak against her, she exhibits all of the fire and outrage of insulted majesty: "Prithee go hence, / Or I shall show the cinders of my spirits / Through th' ashes of my chance" (V.ii.172-74). We see that even in captivity, Cleopatra maintains the brightness of majesty and the fires of passion and life. She rages as she had raged at that unfortunate messenger who confronted her with the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. Cleopatra's anger is irrational, grandly passionate. We recall her irrationality and spirit in another instance, during the preparation for the crucial battle of Actium. Cleopatra, although warned by Enobarbus that her

presence at sea would have a damaging effect upon Antony, insists that she will partake in the glory of battle. Her reliance on emotion rather than on intellect, and Antony's overpowering desire for her and abandonment of his reason, have cost them everything.

Caesar, on the other hand, exemplifies the rationality which is necessary for worldly order and control. He is self-disciplined and decisive, weighing carefully all alternatives and selecting whatever proffers his advantage. However, when Caesar is in Cleopatra's presence, we recognize in his cordiality and officiousness, a pervasive sterility. Caesar has conquered the East and has made Cleopatra his captive. He has unified Rome and brought peace to the "three-nooked world." But we miss the richness of conflict in his character, the ambiguity of emotions which give flavor and meaning to existence. And we fear that the world he represents must likewise partake of his nature and thus be severely rational and cold.

Soon after Caesar leaves the monument, the rustic approaches. He appears to be a simple country man bearing figs for Cleopatra, and so he is allowed to enter without question. That such a ragged and funny fellow should undo the designs of the world's Emperor, points to the limitations of Caesar's control. We see that Caesar's hold upon Cleopatra is chimerical. He cannot extinguish her passionate spirit nor can he forestall her death. We recall Hamlet's sardonic lament at the close of the gravemaker scene:

Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

(V.i.213-14)

Like the gravediggers and Hamlet, the rustic points to the vanity of all earthly attempts to prohibit the natural flow of life and death. Caesar's triumph and power are illusory, for Caesar, like all mortals, will turn to clay and his glorious achievements be reduced to the ordinary function of plugging a hole.

The clown quibbles with Cleopatra and in a matter of fact way illustrates the good reputation of the asp: "I heard of one of them no longer than yesterday, a very honest woman--but something given to lie, as a woman should not do in the way of honesty--how she died of the biting of it, what pain she felt. Truly, she makes a very good report o' th' worm" (V.ii.250-55, emphasis mine). The clown's quibbling over the double sense of the word "lie" (to lie with a man) and of the word "died" (sexual climax) emphasizes the sexual implications of the scene.⁵ The figs which fill the rustic's basket would have represented for the ancients the feminine and the masculine reproductive organs, and theater-goers of the early seventeenth century would not have missed the sexual implications of the clown's entry with the fruit. They might also have associated the rustic and his figs with the "ficarri" or incubus which derives from the ancient god Priapus, the medieval Latin "ficarri" coming either from the word "ficus" the sign of the phallus or simply because the incubi were fond of figs.⁶ Erasmus in The Praise of Folly likewise associates figs with Priapus, calling the ancient god of fertility "that stump of the Fig-Tree Priapus."⁷

Beneath the figs lie the asps, symbols of both death and life. Cleopatra refers to the snake at least three times as an image of

destruction. Before allowing the messenger to speak to her of Antony's business in Rome, she tells the messenger that if he brings news of Antony's death, he should come "like a Fury crown'd with snakes" (II.v.40). And when she hears of Antony's marriage to Octavia, Cleopatra rages, "Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures / Turn all to serpents" (II.v.78-79). When the messenger is interrogated concerning Antony's marriage and promises that he does not lie in this news, Cleopatra again uses the snake as an image of destruction, "O, I would thou didst lie; / So half my Egypt were submerg'd and made a cistern for scal'd snakes!"

In Egyptian mythology, the dragon Apap was the earliest type of mythical representation. He was said to be the prototype of all evil, the devouring reptile which swallowed up all the light and water of the world.⁸ When Cleopatra asks the rustic if the asp will eat her, her words then indicate more than the fright of being physically devoured by the snake. Cleopatra faces the unknown and must fear the prospect of darkness and death. The clown's answer to her earnest question is equivocal. He first states, "You must not think me so simple but I know the devil himself will not eat a woman. I know that a woman is a dish for the gods . . . " (V.ii.272-74). The rustic here suggests that the gods are heavenly epicures. Sumptuous feasting, as we have seen throughout the play, is greatly prized in Egypt. If the gods correspond to the Egyptians in their delight in the senses, then they certainly must find Cleopatra a rare ambrosia. She is not only connected with the extravagant Alexandrian banquets but is also, on numerous occasions,

directly compared to food. Enobarbus, for example, claims that unlike most women who cloy the appetites, "she makes hungry / Where most she satisfies" (II.ii.235-37). And when speaking to Menas of Antony's lack of enthusiasm for chaste Octavia, Enobarbus again refers to Cleopatra as a tempting culinary delight: "Antony will to his Egyptian dish again" (II.vii.126). Even Cleopatra compares herself to food when thinking of Julius Caesar's love for her: "Broad-fronted Caesar, / When thou wast here above the ground, I was / A morsel for a monarch" (I.v.29-31). The rustic's words thus suggest that the gods in the next world, like Antony and Julius Caesar in this one, will savor and prize Cleopatra. No sooner does the rustic console Cleopatra by noting the epicurean nature of the gods, however, than he impishly adds, " . . . if the devil dress her not. But truly, these same whoreson devils do great harm in their women . . . " (V.ii.274-76). Cleopatra's sensuality, which at first seems to bode well for her reception in the afterlife, now seems simply damning. Indeed the words "whoreson devils" carry associations of Christian temptation and judgment and suggest that first phallic marring, the fall of Eve, which also had to do with tasting, a serpent/devil, and figs.

The snake, however, is not solely an image of destruction and evil. It is likewise a symbol of health and procreation. We remember that Antony had affectionately called Cleopatra, "my serpent of old Nile" (I.v.25). And when Lepidus talks with Antony about Egypt, Lepidus marvels at the fertility of the land, and the snake again becomes associated with fecundity and procreation: "Your

serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun" (II.vii.26-27). The snake is likewise an ancient symbol of the phallic powers of generation and healing. On ancient Phoenician medals, we find the snake coiled about a large egg, and in Naples, even today, amulets depicting the phallus encircled by a serpent are sometimes purchased by peasants for good luck.⁹ We likewise recall the snakes encoiling Mercury's caduceus symbolizing his skills in the arts of life. And we remember in Numbers XXXI: 9, Moses lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness: "And Moses made a serpent of brass and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived" (emphasis mine).

The gift which the rustic gives to Cleopatra then is one of both death and life. Just before the rustic's arrival, we hear Cleopatra declare her purpose, "I am again for Cydnus / To meet Mark Antony" (V.ii.228-29). Cleopatra envisions her death as a means to immortal life and love. And while the clown, on the one hand, undermines her idyllic expectations, his repeated farewell, "I wish you all joy o' th' worm" (V.ii.279), suggests that for Cleopatra, death may indeed be a consummation, a release, and a joy. Like Charmian, Cleopatra too may at her death be given leave to play.

The rustic, however, suggests not only the eternal life to be met after death, the qualities of air and fire, he gives the promise of procreation which is associated with the temporal world, the earth and water of Egypt. Cleopatra is often associated with the fertility goddess Isis who represents the "black vegetable mould of the valley,

the distinctive soil of Egypt annually covered and fertilized."¹⁰ We see that on a mythic level Cleopatra's death is the consummation that produces new life for Egypt. If we see all of the implications of fruition and healing that are symbolically represented by the rustic and his gifts, we see Caesar's victory in perspective. Caesar may enslave Egypt, but he cannot inhibit the natural fertility of her soil, nor can his rational mind subdue the emotional powers of its people. The foolish rustic will be himself, and neither the prospect of death nor Caesar's rational order can subdue his natural propensity for life.

The word play and the antics of the rustic may remind us of The Praise of Folly in which Erasmus half-seriously, half-mockingly praises the passionate merriment which stands against reason and philosophy. As the goddess Folly declares herself to be supreme over all the other gods and goddesses of the universe, we attain not only a heightened awareness of the value of folly, we realize that it is a necessity for life itself. The goddess explains what she means by folly when she says, " . . . according to the definition of the Stoicks, Wisdom is nothing else than to be govern'd by reason; and on the contrary Folly, to be giv'n up to the will of our Passions. . . . "¹¹ The first reason that Folly gives for her supreme status over all the other gods is that she alone is responsible for the propagation of the species:

. . . and the Stoicks too, that conceive themselves next to the Gods, yet show me one of them, nay the veryest Bygot of the Sect, and if he do not put off his beard, the badge of Wisdom, though yet it be no more than what is common with him and Goats; yet at least he must lay-by

his supercilious Gravity, smooth his forehead, shake off his rigid Principles, and for some time commit an act of folly and dotage. In fine, that Wiseman who ever he be if he intends to have Children must have recourse to me.¹²

Folly then explains that foolishness is not only necessary for procreation, it is also that which makes society delightful and life rich: "But tell me, by Jupiter, what part of man's life is that that is not sad, crabbed, unpleasant, insipid, troublesome unless it be seasoned with Pleasure, that is to say, Folly?"¹³ Although we laugh at Folly's presumption, we recognize the truth in her words and must admit her preeminence. Crowning her queen of the gods, we likewise raise our opinion of the rustic, for he too represents the unselfconscious love of the earth. And we also sympathize more completely with Cleopatra's dotage on Antony and her desire to participate dramatically in history's decisive moments, for these are expressions of folly that give richness and meaning to life.

In her death scene, Cleopatra, like Erasmus' Folly, attains the status of a goddess. While Cleopatra's skewed crown suggests her affinity with Folly, her regal dress and serene composure indicate more strongly her relation to the goddess Isis. Unlike Hamlet's apotheosis which is related verbally, Cleopatra's ascension is highly visual. The ritualistic solemnity of her death preparations and her majestic bravery transform her from an earthly queen into an heavenly deity. As she reaches for the asp, her words underscore the inversion of power inherent in her death, "Poor venomous fool, / O, couldst thou speak, / That I might hear thee call great Caesar Ass / Unpolicied!" (V.ii.305-07). Like the phallic bladder that the fool

uses to flout those who are too serious, the asp too is an extension of the fool and represents folly's generative powers. It is indeed fitting that Cleopatra address the asp by the name, "fool," for like the fool, the asp is capable of turning existing hierarchies topsy-turvy. His mechanism, however, is not laughter but death. The asp corrects in an instant the Roman's abuse of decorum, flouting young Octavius for his austerity and narrowness of vision while restoring the preeminence of Egypt's sovereign by giving her a playful pinch, "the stroke of death" (V.ii.295). When Cleopatra places the asp to her breast, she translates the conventional emblem of luxury, that of a woman with serpents wriggling from her breasts, into a powerful image of maternal nourishment. Cleopatra, by incorporating folly, transforms both it and herself into the sublime. Caesar's treachery seems indeed petty and inconsequential in the face of this sacrificial act. Reinforcing our impression of Cleopatra's deification, Charmian exclaims, "O eastern star!" (V.ii.308). And Cleopatra herself, senses the purer elements that are now hers and speaks longingly the name of the lover she hopes to embrace, "As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle--O Antony!" (V.ii.310-11). The apotheosis is complete, and our power, deriving from hers, is sure. The rustic whose indecorous entry originally signals a collapse of order paradoxically brings the means for rejuvenation, laughter and death. We sense the impotence of Caesar's sterile authority first through our enjoyment of the rustic's clowning and finally through our feelings of redemption and joy at Cleopatra's

death. We realize at last the clown's meaning when he wishes Cleopatra and us "all joy of the worm" (V.ii.260).

Notes

¹Janet Adelman, The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), p. 49.

²Duncan S. Harris, "'Again for Cydnus': The Dramaturgical Resolution of Antony and Cleopatra," Studies in English Literature, 17 (1977), 227.

³Harold Fisch, "Antony and Cleopatra: The Limits of Mythology," Shakespeare Survey, 23 (1970), 64.

⁴Willeford, p. 110.

⁵G. Blakemore Evans, ed., Riverside, see footnotes on p. 138 for lines 252 and 254.

⁶Richard Payne Knight and Thomas Wright, Sexual Symbolism: A History of Phallic Worship, II (New York: Julian Press, Inc., 1957), p. 75.

⁷Desiderius Erasmus, The Praise of Folly (U.S.A.: Walter J. Black, 1942), p. 116.

⁸Albert Churchward, The Signs and Symbols of Primordial Man: The Evolution of Religious Doctrines from the Eschatology of the Ancient Egyptians (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1912), p. 460.

⁹Knight and Wright, I, p. 77 and II, pp. 78-79.

¹⁰Churchward, p. 457.

¹¹Erasmus, pp. 117-118.

¹²Erasmus, pp. 106-107.

¹³Erasmus, p. 108.

CHAPTER X
LAUGHTER AND OUR IMPERILED CHILD:
THE RETURN OF SPRING IN THE LATE COMEDIES

Death's restorative power, a theme introduced as early as The Comedy of Errors, goes through complex and varied development throughout the canon. It receives its clearest and most comprehensive treatment, however, in the late comedies. Here, death and renewal are not tangential concerns, as they are in many of the early comedies. They are central, dominant themes. By briefly comparing The Winter's Tale to Much Ado About Nothing, two plays using mock-death and resurrection, we see how exhaustive and emphatic death's treatment is in these last romances. The death of Hermione, symbolizing Leontes' lost faith, spans almost the entire length of the play; her persecution and resulting death occur in Acts I and II with her restoration coming in the play's final scene. Mamillius' and Camillo's deaths, the savage cruelty which attends the sentence of the helpless babe Perdita, and the death of Hermione, which neither the audience nor Leontes knows is feigned until the final scene, create a sense of death's substantiality. In contrast, Claudio's accusations and Hero's pretended death in Much Ado do not take place until Act IV, and the audience is at all times aware that Hero lives. Since death is far more symbolic than real in the play, Claudio's encounter with death is short and the damage is easily

repaired. Claudio's brief penance, a single night's vigil at the grave of Hero, is sufficient to restore both his bride and reputation while for Leontes, sixteen years of prayer and meditation under the strict tutelage of Paulina are needed before Hermione and Perdita are found. And even this lengthy period of contrition is not enough to bring back Leontes' only son Mamillius.

Indeed, Shakespeare's treatment of death in the late comedies bears more in common with that in the tragedies and the tragicomedies than with its treatment in the early comedies. Like the tragedies, Shakespeare's late romances concern the magical affinity between the ruler and his realm. The use of pastoral and romance conventions reinforce the association between the king's spiritual health and the prosperity of the land. While the crimes of Cymbeline, Leontes, and Alonso are as reprehensible as those committed by many of Shakespeare's tragic heroes and heroines, the romance kings are able to avoid the fate of their tragic counterparts and return to the center of the kingdom. Because the romance genre is more artificial and contrived than is the tragic, the effects of the king's crimes are easily mitigated. This in turn enables the king to purge the nation through a symbolic death. His pain and guilt are manifested not in his violent and sudden physical death but in his spiritual death, in the long years of separation from family and friends. Thus, the catharsis of romance is not as in tragedy the opening of a floodgate--intense climax, release, and revelation--but rather a steady, though intricate and winding, journey home. The reunion of the king with his adult child at the play's end signifies the

completion of his and our own return, our reconciliation to the pain and the joy that time brings.

As in Shakespeare's middle comedies so too in the late comedies, mock deaths and death threats substitute for the real deaths of the tragedies. They symbolize not only spiritual isolation but the tremendous sacrifice needed for restoration. Since Shakespeare's tragicomedies concern the coming of adulthood, the sacrificial role belongs both to the bride and to the groom. It is usually the female, however, who more willingly gives of herself, thus teaching the reluctant male the necessity of faith. The heroine, Northrop Frye explains, sacrifices her virginity, the inviolate core of her being, so that the hero may live. The Alcestis-Admetus myth, he observes, serves as a prototype for this pattern whereby marriage provides a substitute for death.¹ The heroine's sacrifice, however, does not free Shakespeare's hero from time's obligations. Unlike Admetus, who expresses little embarrassment over his wife's intercession, the Shakespearean hero must admonish his pride and repent his skepticism. As he humbles himself, the hero, like the heroine, risks dissolution. By a leap of faith, he immerses himself in the destructive element, thereby achieving a new and a more vital identity as husband and prospective father.

While his middle comedies examine the transition from youth to manhood, Shakespeare's late romances concern the waning powers of aging kings. The romances' evocation of passing years and distant places suggests time's unrelenting and pervasive presence and thus the need for periodic renewal. Spiritual rejuvenation, however, can

only come when the old monarch begins to transfer his power to men and women not yet burdened by past errors or regrets. The aging ruler must establish a new relationship with his heirs, accepting his children's maturity as he acknowledges his own advancing age. The mock deaths of the children represent the separation needed to develop new relations. These deaths usually signify as well the father's sins, his cruelty, intolerance, or neglect. That there can be no question in Alonso's mind of the connection between his own crimes and Ferdinand's "death," Ariel, disguised as a harpy, appears to remind him of his past crimes and present sorrows:

But remember
 (For that's my business to you) that you three
 From Milan did supplant good Prospero
 Expos'd unto the sea (which hath requit it)
 Him, and his innocent child; for which foul deed
 The pow'rs, delaying (not forgetting), have
 Incens'd the seas and shores--yea, all the creatures,
 Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
 They have bereft; . . .

(The Tempest, III.iii.68-76)

As in the tragicomedies, the appearance of death precipitates self-knowledge. By celebrating the nuptials of his children and by extending to them large portions of his kingdom, the king severs the bonds of their dependence and increases his own vulnerability. This release of power, however, paradoxically brings the leader spiritual strength, for it assures continuity and order for his kingdom. Thus by meeting the demands of time, by admitting mistakes and finding humility, the aging ruler embraces the future, replenishes his lands, and defers his own death.

Because death becomes a formidable power in the late comedies, it has, as in the tragedies and the tragicomedies, a gothic value. The horrible deaths by fire of incestuous Antiochus and his daughter in Pericles, the bloody but laughable decapitation of Cloten in Cymbeline, and the comically violent bear attack of Antigonus in The Winter's Tale strike us initially with abhorrence. Because these characters are tainted, however, Antiochus and Cloten being clearly villains and Antigonus serving as the agent of tyranny, their deaths, though gruesome, hint at a cosmic justice that protects the innocent as it destroys the wicked. Thus as in Measure for Measure and All's Well, fear intermingles with hope. The deaths or apparent deaths of idealized characters, such as Marina and Thaisa in Pericles, Mamillius, Hermione and Perdita in The Winter's Tale, Imogen in Cymbeline, and Ferdinand in The Tempest also partake of the grotesque, for they are sudden deaths associated with cruelty, seeming cosmic indifference, and/or retribution. New elements, however, are added to these plays that help to transform death from a repugnant reality into a distant, evocative, and sometimes beautiful idea. Remote settings, eloquent language, stylized manners, contrived actions, and mysterious and even magical events, all conventions of the pastoral romance, provide an ephemeral, soft haze through which to view death. Thus pastoral values in the last plays help to metamorphose bodily decay into treasures "rich and strange."

By looking at Erwin Panofsky's examination of the convention of death in Arcady, we may better understand Shakespeare's use of death in his green world romances. According to Panofsky, the phrase "Et

in *Arcadia Ego*" underwent a change in meaning from Guercino's introduction of it as a title for his dark pastoral to Nicholas Poussin's second painting by that name.² The literal translation for the Latin, explains Panofsky, is "Even in Arcady there am I." As we look at Guercino's work, we assume that the speaker is Death, for the composition shows a lush, tranquil setting in which two shepherds stand gazing at a ghoulish, animated death's head positioned prominently on a tomb (Fig. 15). Although a few new elements are added in Poussin's first painting bearing the title *Et in Arcadia Ego* (Fig. 16), the work, according to Panofsky, carries basically the same meaning as Guercino's. The death's head, however, is smaller and less conspicuous than in the earlier pastoral. The additions of the river god Alpheus who sits dejectedly by the tomb and the woman suggest the motifs of grief and love. But these new themes are still subordinate to the gothic caveat, "Remember your death." Indeed Panofsky compares the look of surprise and dismay animating the shepherds and the shepherdess in this work to the startled reaction of the young aristocrats halted in the woods by figures of death in the legend of *The Three Living and the Three Dead*. In Poussin's second *Et in Arcadia Ego* presently housed in the Louvre the treatment is quite different (Fig. 17). Four Arcadians surrounding a classical sepulchre discuss its Latin inscription. There is no death's head to frighten the young in this idyll and the postures and faces of the Arcadians bear no signs of urgency or distress. The composition's symmetry and balance also contribute to a sense of repose. Panofsky notes this change in mood: "The Arcadians are not so much warned of



Fig. 15. Giovanni Francesco Guercino, Et in Arcadia Ego, Rome
Galleria Corsini (1621-23).



Fig. 16. Nicolas Poussin, Et in Arcadia Ego, Chatsworth, England, Devonshire Collection (1629-30)



Fig. 17. Nicolas Poussin, Et in Arcadia Ego, Paris, Louvre (1640)

an implacable future as they are immersed in mellow meditations of a beautiful past. They seem to think less of themselves than of a human being buried in the tomb--a human being that once enjoyed the pleasures which they now enjoy, and whose monument 'bids them remember their end' only in so far as it evokes the memory of one who had been what they are."³ Panofsky explains that to translate the phrase "Et in Arcadia Ego" with the preterite, "I too was in Arcadia," is to violate Latin grammar. He insists, however, that this is the translation that the Louvre painting compels us to make. These paintings thus show a movement from the memento mori to the personal lament, from a concentration on the present and future (I too am in Arcadia) to a concentration on the past (I too was in Arcadia).

As in the series of paintings, so too in Shakespeare's late comedies, the gothic interest in horror becomes subordinate to the wistful remembrance of things past. The most abhorrent deaths are after all relegated to minor characters and with the exception of Cloten's are narrated rather than enacted on stage. Like the grisly skull in Guercino's painting, death in Shakespeare's tragicomedies and tragedies shocks us into a recognition that we are worm's meat and must prepare our souls, while death in the late romances, somewhat like the carved inscription on the classical sarcophagus in the second Poussin, gently reminds us of the personal loss experienced in this world when we forget our mortality. The winter flower rosemary that Perdita offers Polixenes and Camillo at the sheepshearing festival is such a reminder of loss. And like The

Winter's Tale, whose title stresses the declining years of Leontes, Polixenes, and Hermione, the other romances as well primarily focus on those who soon must die. They are, however, stories of both remembrance and grace, rosemary and rue. From remembrance and repentance springs a new chance, an opportunity for the old to extend themselves by loving and freeing their children. Thus, Perdita after presenting the disguised King and his counselor with their flowers, responds to Ferdinand's merry complaint that she would strew him with flowers like a corpse, "Not like a bank for love to lie and play on; / Not like a corse; or if, not to be buried, / But quick and in mine arms" (IV.iv.130-32). But while Acts IV and V emphasize the return of life through the love of Perdita and Florizel, the play never allows us to forget the severity of Leontes' loss. When Leontes first looks on the son of Polixenes he is struck anew by the horror of his sin: "I have done sin, / For which the heavens, taking angry note, / Have left me issueless" (V.i.172-74). And then upon seeing the "statue" of Hermione, he remarks on the aged face of his queen, "But yet, Paulina, / Hermione was not so wrinkled, nothing / So aged as this seems" (V.ii.27-29). The unveiling of Hermione and her return to life thus point not only to the renewal of the spirit, the wonder of grace and love, but also to the lost years that can never be reclaimed. A lingering sense of regret, springing from deep, personal loss, also underlies the reconciliation scene of The Tempest. For Prospero's return to Milan means not only restoration, but also retirement. His most vigorous years have been spent in near isolation on an unnamed island where his rule was restricted to

spirits and monsters. He will now return to Milan to participate in the marriage of his child and then will hand over the care of his dukedom to Miranda and Ferdinand. We sense Prospero's awareness of time's brevity when he says that "every third thought will be my grave," and we recall his troubled words to Ferdinand, "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (IV.i.156-58). We remember that in I Henry IV Hal claimed that he could "so offend to make offense a skill, / Redeeming time when men think least I will" (I.ii.216-17). Hal was able to redeem the time because he was aware of the ramifications and the extent of his truancy even as he played the prodigal. Cymbeline, Leontes, Alonso, and Prospero, blind to the severity of their offenses, are not so fortunate. For them the time cannot be fully recovered.

The remembrance of what is lost, however, mingles with hope for what is to come. Because death and grief are more substantial in these late comedies than in the early ones, the opportunity to embrace family and friends after years of estrangement seems a marvelous and rare gift. This hope, we may also see in the pictorial tradition of death and Arcady. Panofsky ends his discussion of the elegiac tradition with a reference to a painting by Fragonard in which two cupids, "probably the spirits of departed lovers," embrace one another inside a ruptured tomb (Fig. 18). Other cupids are suspended above while "a friendly genius illumines the scene with the light of a nuptial torch." Panofsky explains that "Here the development has run full cycle. To Guercino's 'Even in Arcady, there is death' Fragonard's drawing replies, 'Even in death, there may be

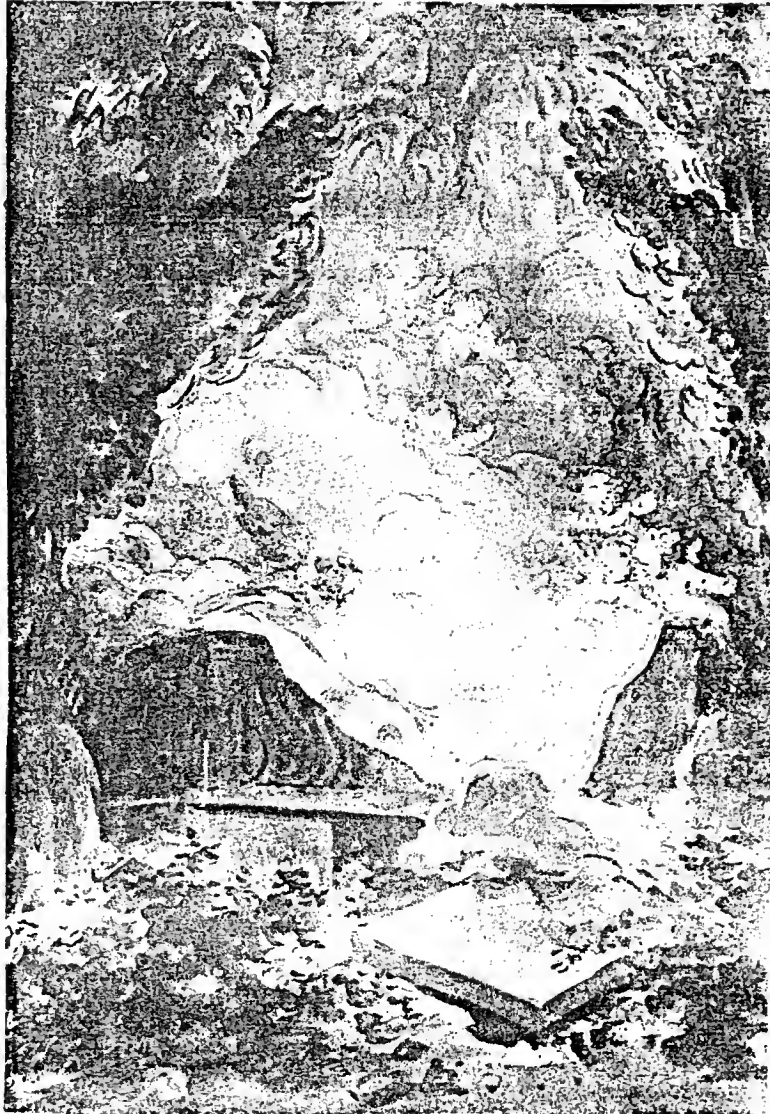


Fig. 18. Honore Fragonard, The Tomb (drawing), Vienna, Albertina

Arcady'."4 Fragonard's "Tomb" reflects a gothic interest through the image of the broken sarcophagus, but the gothic is used not to strike fear in the soul of the viewer but rather to magnify the lovers' victory. Panofsky does not mention the comical elements in Fragonard's work. Humor, however, touches the scene in the sight of the embracing cupids lying contentedly in the tomb and in the effusive cluster of hovering cupids who have come to celebrate the lovers' victory. Here, we may observe a final blending of past, present, and future. We experience sadness when we reflect on the deaths of the young lovers, a humorous detachment as we take interest in the strangeness of the images, and hope as we anticipate the continued triumph of love. Shakespeare's last plays likewise blend sweet regret with joyful celebration and emphasize as in Fragonard's drawing the victory of the human spirit over the grave.

As in Fragonard's work, so too in Shakespeare's last plays romance elements make use of gothic details. For an awareness of bodily decay is necessary in creating a sense of wonder when those believed dead are found to live, and when families and friends long separated are reunited. Ariel's song to Ferdinand in Act I of The Tempest with its lyrical simplicity and haunting imagery is perhaps Shakespeare's most comforting and suggestive description of death, and yet much of the song's power derives from the grotesque:

Full fathom five thy father lies:
 Of his bones are coral made;
 Those are pearls that were his eyes;
 Nothing of him doth fade

But doth suffer a sea-change
 Into something rich and strange.

(I.ii.397-402)

Ariel's words suggest that the body of Alonso lies still in the water's depth where it is curiously and magically altered. The body of the King has lost its power to act and is now merely acted upon--transformed by the sea. Coral bones and eyes of pearl are images as cold as the sea itself. Indeed, the visual picture of pearls couched in fleshless eye-sockets is a bizarre and disturbing one, suggesting the reality that death obliterates those qualities that are traditional emblems of our identity. The bones that once gave motion to the man must now cling eternally to the sea's floor, and the once colorful and mobile eyes, the proverbial windows of the soul and surveyors of the world, are now still, colorless, and impenetrable. We experience, however, comfort as well as loss, for coral and pearls are among the richest and most beautiful treasures of the sea. The basic idea in Ariel's song is epicurean, that atoms never vanish, but are merely regrouped into new forms of matter. But while the transposition described is material, Ariel's own immateriality and the delicate and enchanting beauty of the song imply a spiritual significance as well. Death may allow the soul, like the body, to undergo a "sea-change," a miraculous and grotesquely beautiful rebirth. In the play's final scene, Prospero's forgiveness of his enemies and his almost simultaneous admission that the comical monster Caliban is his, "this thing of darkness, I acknowledge mine," becomes the spiritual correlative of the material metamorphosis

described in Ariel's song. The grotesque is thus essential to the regenerative theme of Shakespeare's late comedies. It blends with the conventions of romance to suggest the mysterious transforming power of self-knowledge, faith, and love.

The mingling of chilling images of bodily dissolution with the tender remembrance of the irretrievable past, however, accounts for only part of our response to death in the late plays. Humor and merriment often blend with the gothic-romantic treatment, allowing us a reprieve from both horror and grief. This release enhances our hope that all will end happily at the same time that it reduces our tendencies to object to the play's sentimental treatment of death. In Pericles, for example, the comical interlude of the fishermen comes at a moment when Pericles has escaped both Antiochus' assassination plot and the raging tempest that has drowned all of Pericles' companions. As the fishermen pull the rusted armor to shore, they imbue the moment with a gaiety both augmenting our sense of Pericles' miraculous escape from death and suggesting the protective quality of Simonides' kingdom. Pericles has reached a safe haven where he will be recognized by Simonides as a king and will win the hand of Thaisa. The fishermen, although of the lowest stratum of society, partake of the goodness of Simonides. Their free-spirited gaiety provides a rustic counter-part to the dancing and revels of the court.

The fishermen's playfulness, like a magical net, pulls Pericles to the safety of Pentapolis and suggests a happy end to all of Pericles' adventures. Pericles has at last moved beyond the circle

of Antiochus' treachery, the sphere dominated by incest and death. The fishermen's cajolery marks this freedom. Thus, as in the earlier plays, humor here becomes a saturnalian celebration of life's victory over death. The play's movement from the grave threats of Antiochus to the merry jests of the fishermen reminds us of the cyclical pattern of life. The cyclical motion of death and life is like that of the sea that both murders (i.e., Pericles' men) and feeds (i.e., the fishermen). As we associate this rhythmical pattern with the sea, we prepare to see the cycle repeat itself when Pericles undertakes his sea voyage to Tyre. The fishermen's gaiety thus furnishes us hope that Thaisa's death in childbirth during the sea storm will, like Pericles' symbolic drowning, be mysteriously reversed.

Although we identify in part with characters like Pericles and Thaisa and find joy in their final happiness, this vicarious response accounts for only part of our sense of rejuvenation. Arcady, whether it bears the name Pentapolis, Milford Haven, or Bohemia, or whether it has no name like Prospero's island, is a natural home for romance characters. Accustomed to less clement surroundings, however, we may find the green world cloying and its treatment of death offensively sentimental. To counter a potentially critical response, humor combines with the romantic conception of death. Richard Levin has shown how the clown sub-plot may work as a "lightning rod attracting to itself and draining away some undesired negative feeling which might endanger [the purposed] response."⁵ Parody does not always overturn the values established in the serious actions, but rather by

supplying an outlet for our own possible hostilities, it may support these values. Levin explains that fools and clowns often parody the ideal of courtly love, thus cancelling our potential skepticism. In As You Like It, for example, Touchstone's courting of the coarse shepherdess Audrey casts playful aspersions on Orlando's inexhaustible love tributes to Rosalind. Touchstone tells his uncomprehending mistress, "I am here with thee and thy goats as the most capricious poet, honest Ovid, was among the Goths" (III.iii.7-9). Just as humor here reasserts the theme of romantic love, so too it may, by mocking excessive emotions attached to the themes of death and rebirth, affirm the mystery of resurrection. Fragonard, for example, exaggerates the artificiality of romantic conventions. By providing a self-conscious parody of his own sentiments, he provides an outlet for our hostile feelings and thus preserves his fanciful theme. In Pericles the fishermen, by positing a realistic dimension to the kingdom, paradoxically intensify the kingdom's ideal status. When the third fisherman marvels at how the fish live, the master fisherman explains:

Why, as men do a-land; the great ones eat up the little ones. I can compare our rich misers to nothing so fitly as to a whale; 'a plays and tumbles, driving the poor fry before him, and at last devour them all at a mouthful. Such whales have I heard on a' th' land, who never leave gaping till they swallow'd the whole parish, church, steeple, bells, and all.

(II.i.28-34)

By offering criticism of social inequities, the fisherman provides a "lightning rod" to deflect our possible objections to the fairy tale

kingdom of Pentapolis. No sooner does the fisherman present the analogy than his helper suggests a magical purge for the nation's ills:

But, master, if I had been the sexton, I would have
 been that day in the belfry.

 Because he should have swallow'd me too, and when I
 had been in his belly, I would have kept such a
 jangling of the bells, that he should never have
 left till he cast bells, steeple, church, and
 parish up again.

(II.i.36-43)

The fisherman's outrageous plan for making the whale heave the small fry diminishes the reality of the social problem. Comically purged of injustices, the kingdom may now stand flawless. Indeed, when telling Pericles of the kingdom, the fisherman drops all "finny" analogies and reports simply, "This is call'd Pentapolis, and our king the good Simonides" (II.i.99-100). When Pericles questions, "The good Simonides . . . ?" (II.i.101), the fisherman unequivocally supports his epithet: "Ay, sir, and he deserves so to be call'd for his peacable reign and good government" (II.i.102-03). The fisherman's resurrection of the parish comically parallels the miraculous return of Pericles from watery death so that both the goodness of Simonides and the remarkable return of Pericles are placed beyond question. The mystery of resurrection and the ideal of goodness are made accessible to us because they are accompanied by what is uniquely human--laughter.

In Shakespeare's tragedies, humor often erupts in a single moment and signals the death of the protagonist. And as in ancient

rituals of sacrifice, humor is both sardonic and lighthearted. The mocking jibes of the clownish characters help us to dissociate ourselves from the doomed hero or heroine and their lighthearted gaiety entices us to celebrate the purging of guilt and the return to order that the sacrifice makes possible. While in tragedy the hero must suffer real death for the revival of the state, in comedy the hero's death is symbolically represented often by his psychological distress when he discovers a loved one to be dead. Since he suffers only a figurative death and must be reintegrated in the new society at the play's close, surrogates are needed to deflect and dissipate our animosity. Villains, usually accessories to the hero's crimes, serve this function, as do laughable characters who by mirroring the hero's folly make his crimes seem less threatening. In The Winter's Tale, for example, Antigonus, who shares in Leontes' guilt, both by carrying out the orders to abandon the babe and by believing Hermione to be unfaithful, plays the role of the substitute scapegoat and sacrificial victim. Antigonus and his shipmates, like the tragic protagonists Hamlet, Macbeth, and Cleopatra, find themselves the butt of a cosmic joke: " . . . but first, how the poor souls roar'd, and the sea mock'd them; and how the poor gentleman roar'd and the bear mock'd, both roaring louder than the sea or weather" (III.iii.98-102). The sacrificial nature of Antigonus' death is suggested by Perdita's simultaneous salvation and by the play's sudden shift in tone at this moment. "Heavy matters, heavy matters! But look thee here, boy, Now bless thyself: thou met'st with things dying, I with things newborn" (III.iii.114). Gaiety and laughter replace our

concern for the family of Leontes. Like Perdita, we are left in Bohemia to be nurtured in the following act by the shepherd and his foolish son. Laughter thus provides a springboard by which we escape the doom of Antigonus.

Laughter continues to deflate the tragic possibilities of the play by holding up a looking-glass wherein we see both the fractured images of the royal fathers, Leontes and Polixenes, and of ourselves. The rustic receives the honor of raising Perdita, a privilege Leontes has denied himself by his rash actions. The shepherd's tenderness when finding the babe, "Good luck, and't be thy will! . . . Mercy on's, a barne? A very pretty barne!" (III.iii.68-70) contrasts the callousness of Leontes as he orders Antigonus to leave the child in a remote place to die, "We enjoin thee . . . that thou carry / This female bastard hence" (II.iii.173-75). While the shepherd's gentle treatment of the infant sets in relief Leontes' tyranny, the shepherd's excitement over the gold found with the child, "This is fairy gold, boy, and 'twill prove so. Up with't, keep it close" (III.iii.123-24), reminds us of the tendency of us all to care first for our own self-interest. The shepherd thus incorporates the potentialities for both good and bad fathering that are apparent in the two kings. The shepherd provides a warm, cheerful home for Perdita, yet he, like Leontes and Polixenes, will sacrifice his child to protect himself. The shepherd symbolically disowns Perdita to save his own life when he tells Polixenes that Perdita is "a changeling." The shepherd's son explains: "She being none of your flesh and blood your flesh and blood has not offended

the King; and so your flesh and blood is not to be punished by him" (IV.iv.693-95). As the theme of abandonment is played out comically by the shepherd, it loses its tragic intensity, for the shepherd is, like all clowns, too childish to be held morally accountable for his self-indulgence. He indeed softens our response to Polixenes and Leontes, for we sense that, like the rustics, they have the potential for childlike innocence that may, with the help of the unwitting shepherd, be realized. We recall that when the shepherd first finds Perdita he is looking for his lost sheep. It is thus fitting that he be the one to uncover the truth that unites the two friends, who once "were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' th'sun' . . . (I.ii.67).

Our relation to the shepherd is exemplified by the image of a joker printed on an Austrian Tarot card of the fifteenth century. A female joker holds up a mirror in which we can view the outline of a face. William Willeford notes that "there is something 'wrong' with the reflected image: the face in her mirror is too small, and the mirror is directed towards the viewer, not toward her. The image has something of the bauble's character of being semiautonomous with respect to the fool and of reflecting the audience as well as him (or, in this case her)."⁶ Like the joker's mirror the shepherd's parody reflects its audience, showing us our affinity to the parental fools. Like the rustic and the kings, we too are called to be good shepherds and good parents. Before we can tend others, however, the sheep or the child that we must first find and nurture is the innocent life within ourselves. We free our inner child just as Leontes and Polixenes free Perdita and Florizel by recognizing the

special value of the child. Laughter is our gesture of this recognition just as the acceptance of their children's marriage choice is the king's. The bumptious shepherd thus holds up a mirror to show us at once our own mortality (for the fool is the supreme emblem of mortality and error) and our capacity for joy (for the fool is also the supreme emblem of the child). As we can see by looking at both Pericles and The Winter's Tale, comedy functions in the late plays to preserve the integrity of the pastoral values of death and rebirth and to provide a vehicle for both the protagonist's and our own escape from the doom that in the real world would likely follow acts of tyranny and violence. Laughter enables us to recover, nurture, and free our own lost and imperiled child.

Notes

¹Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 88-89.

²Panofsky, Et in Arcadia Ego, pp. 304-320. My paragraph summarizes Panofsky's remarks on the pastoral motif of death in Arcady. For colored plates of Poussin's works, see Nicholas Poussin, ed. Walter Friedlaender (Paris: Cercle D'Art, 1965), pp. 113, 147.

³Panofsky, Et in Arcadia Ego, p. 313.

⁴Panofsky, Et in Arcadia Ego, pp. 319-320.

⁵Richard Levin.

⁶Willeford, p. 39.

CHAPTER XI
"FREEDOM, HIGH-DAY! HIGH-DAY, FREEDOM!":
CIRCLES OF FREEDOM IN THE TEMPEST

In The Tempest, Shakespeare mingles death and laughter in a more balanced and integrated way than in any previous play. As in his tragedies, the plot is primarily one of descent. Alonso, like the monarchs of the tragedies, moves steadily towards insanity and despair. The nadir of his descent comes when, to prevent his suicide, he is locked in the magical ring by Ariel. While in many of Shakespeare's tragedies, mirth merges with death in brief, isolated moments, in The Tempest, comical episodes surface intermittently throughout the play, indicating a rising current of hope that reinforces our attachment to the young lovers Ferdinand and Miranda who represent life's continuity. Thus, The Tempest takes from the tragedies the intensity of the descent theme and from the early comedies the comical subplot that promises freedom and joy.

There is, however, an important difference in the use of humor from the early comedies to this last play. For The Tempest, more in keeping with the tragicomedies, uses the comedy of death. Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, like Parolles and Lucio, are scurrilous rogues who are intimately linked to death. The comical triumvirate's plot, after all, involves murder. Part of the reassurance then that these villains offer comes from our awareness of their impotence.

The playful ease with which Ariel confuses the murderous crew and overturns the plot suggests that Sebastian and Antonio, fools of a higher order, can be controlled as well. The comedy of death in The Tempest indeed offers us more hope than in either All's Well or Measure for Measure, for Caliban is far more easily contained than either the miles gloriosus Parolles or the bawds and lechers that infest Measure for Measure. Unlike Vincentio and the King of France, Prospero has magical powers and thus can control the vicious monster and his partners from the play's beginning. The first meeting of the comical conspirators shows us how truly vulnerable and ridiculous they are. Caliban and Trinculo first confederate because of their mutual desire for protection. Caliban fears that Prospero's spirits have been sent to torment him and crouches down, hoping to be overlooked: "Lo, now, lo, / Here comes a spirit of his, and to torment me / For bringing wood in slowly. I'll fall flat; / Perchance he will not mind me" (II.i.14-17). When Stephano then joins him under his gaberdine to escape the storm, the two-headed monster, grotesque and frightened, moves us to laughter rather than to fear. If we compare these shivering fools to proud and influential Parolles or tenacious and resilient Lucio, we see how the comedy of death in The Tempest compels us towards joy.

There is another important aspect to the laughable in The Tempest. This, however, seems an extension of its function in the tragedies. The tragicomical moment in plays such as Hamlet, Antony and Cleopatra, and Macbeth blends abusive quips with light-hearted jests. As we laugh at the quibbles of the gravediggers, the clown,

and the porter at the expense of the protagonists, we align ourselves with the clowns and distinguish ourselves from those who must die. Lively merriment, accompanying the invective humor, then helps us to celebrate the renewed innocence available to us through the sacrifice. The Tempest also integrates abusive and joyous laughter. And as in the tragedies, the mixture points towards the monarch's psychological death and towards our self-knowledge and regeneration. Unlike the tragedies, however, the comical is not limited to an isolated moment but occurs throughout the play. This prevalence serves an important purpose, for it helps to diffuse our sympathies. We are not permitted close attachment to a single character. Since we do not identify as strongly with Alonso as with the tragic heroes, we may find substitutes, such as Antonio, Sebastian, Caliban, and even Prospero, to carry portions of our guilt. This allows Alonso to experience merely a symbolic death and to be reintegrated into the new order at the play's close.

The Tempest thus incorporates many of the ideas previously discussed, most importantly, a confrontation with death as a means to self-knowledge, the necessity of sacrifice in the process of renewal, and the mingling of humor with the idea of death to promote for the audience a sense of compassion and freedom. While these elements remain implicit in many of the earlier plays, they are boldly delineated in Shakespeare's final work. Thus, The Tempest provides the fullest realization of Shakespeare's development of tragic-comic synthesis and may serve as a paradigm of his regenerative process.

As we engage in the actions of The Tempest, we begin our quest for freedom. Caliban's drunken cry, "Freedom, high-day! high-day, freedom!" (II.ii.186) comically echoes our own desire to break the restraints of mortality and escape responsibilities that come with being human. We suspect that Caliban, however, can only escape his own brutishness in rare and brief moments, for his nature, as Prospero explains, is one on which "nurture can never stick" (II.i.189). Caliban's schemes for freedom are thus fated to comical ruin and Caliban himself to fairy pinches, "dry convulsions," and "aged cramps" (IV.i.259-60). While Caliban lacks the fundamental reasoning powers that can bring him lasting self-knowledge and freedom, most of the characters and we the audience are capable of attaining liberty within bounds. Paradoxically, the potential freedom that the play holds out as possible paradoxically can be had only by accepting mortal limits. An awareness of our limitations helps us to sympathize with others, for we know that they too are fallible and mortal. Thus, the energies once used in the struggle to escape mortality are channeled into sympathy and love. As we extend the boundaries of the self in compassion and laughter, we escape spiritually the constrictions of death.

The island itself possesses an antithetical quality, symbolizing both the mortal limitations and the comic possibilities of humanity. While on the one hand, the island seems constrictive and barren, on the other, it suggests freedom and plenty. Like a prison, the island bars the inhabitants from the rest of the world. None of the people have come here by choice, and most would gladly leave if

only they could. Even Ariel complains that he is forced to stay against his will: "Remember . . . / . . . / . . . Thou did promise / To bate me a full year" (I.ii.247-49). The island is encircled by the tempestuous walls of the sea and controlled by the stern magician Prospero whose magic holds all activities in check. Prospero forces sleep upon the royal party to replenish their spirits and suspends their motions to prevent catastrophes like murder and suicide. But while these spells may be for the company's good, they also suggest the spiritual paralysis that comes when one strives against the natural and moral laws of the universe. Thus, captivated by Ariel's music, Caliban and his partners find themselves dancing in a filthy pool, while Alonso, Stephano, and Antonio, after their experience with the disappearing banquet, are "confin'd together . . . all prisoners. . . . They cannot budge till [Prospero's] release" (V.i.8-11). While all of these villains experience the harsh chains of the isle, Miranda and Ferdinand also, though to a lesser degree, feel its restrictions. Ferdinand is held prisoner and forced to carry logs, and Miranda lives under the constant guard of her father. While Prospero is far from being the incestuous and murderous tyrant Antiochus in Pericles, the magician's severe treatment of Ferdinand, making him perform the tasks of the slave, Caliban, and his stringent warnings to the couple suggest a possessive concern for Miranda. Ferdinand and Miranda have none of the freedom of Rosalind and Orlando in their pastoral abode. Indeed there is no complete scene in which the couple are shown alone, free to do as they like. Prospero is always hovering close by,

eavesdropping, presenting entertainment, give warnings--always controlling.

The confinement of the isle sets the play against the traditional pastoral where leisure and pleasure fill the shepherd's days. The shepherd of the pastoral, explains Poggioli, "finds his emblem not in the wise and prudent ant of the fable, who works all year round to be ready to face the challenge of winter, but in the carefree grasshopper, who spends all summer in song and dance."¹ The play's preoccupation with work and time thus suggests the industry of the ant rather than the merry freedom of the grasshopper. Hoping to persuade Ferdinand to rest from his labors, Miranda says, "My father is hard at study" (II.ii.19). Her words remind us both of Ferdinand's diligent service and of her father's interest in works and time. And Ferdinand's reply, "The sun will set before I shall discharge / What I must strive to do" (II.ii.22-23) echoes the continuing concern of Prospero to bring his plans to completion before nightfall. Paralleling Prospero's attention to time is Shakespeare's own adherence to the classical unities in the play's construction. This conformity, which has interested critics for its singularity among the romances, creates for us an added sense of boundaries. The play, with its limitations of time and space, encloses the isle which is surrounded by the sea. Herein are confined characters who are further limited by their mortality, sin, and ignorance. And in their speeches, images of circles relating to spiritual and physical paralysis abound. Prospero, for example, reminds Ariel of "Sycorax, who with age and envy / Was grown into a

hoop" (I.ii.257) and kept him imprisoned for twelve years within a cloven pine. And Prospero uses the image of the circle to emphasize the certainty of death: "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (IV.i.156-58). The concentric circles enveloping humanity suggest both the characters' and our own strict confinement. We are placed under high security, and the penalty for attempted escape is spiritual death.

Yet while the island may be likened to a prison, it is paradoxically and simultaneously a haven of remarkable freshness and beauty. It seems at times like Arcady, a locus amoenus or charming oasis, far away from the workaday world where one may rest and replenish the spirit through contact with nature. Thus, while corresponding circles point on the one hand to confinement, they also suggest the Ptolemaic conception of the cosmos which links the microcosm and the macrocosm, humanity and God. When people resist the inclination to break their mortal confines, harmony with the cosmos is possible. Thus, music with its numerical proportions carries a special significance in The Tempest, for it symbolizes the freedom possible when one attends to natural and moral laws. "To a Neoplatonist," explains David Woodman, "this theory of harmony and music was especially acceptable, fitting easily into his framework of a universe with its music of the sphere, its Pythagorean numerology, and its conception of harmonics as a link between microcosm and macrocosm."² Boethius' tripartite theory of musical correspondences, which according to John Hollander, was canonical during the sixteenth century, describes the relationship among the cosmos, the individual,

and "music itself." The three concepts are drawn together by the idea of "temperament":

By musica mundana Boethius meant the harmony of the universe, including the cosmological order of elements, astral bodies, and seasons whose typical model . . . was, for the Ancient and Medieval worlds, the music of the spheres. By human music he denoted 'that which unites the incorporeal activity of the reason with the body . . . a certain mutual adaptation and as it were a tempering of high and low sounds into a single consonance.' This paralleled the cosmic music in causing 'a blending of the body's elements'; the most significant term in Boethius' whole discussion of musica humana is the notion of 'temperament,' which was made to apply almost from the beginning of linguistic history both to the tuning of strings and to the tempering of various parts of the human soul, thoughts, feelings, the relation of the soul to the body, etc.³

Hollander explains that through musica instrumentalis, the practical music that imitates the harmonica mundi, one can achieve this tempering. One can indeed "regain in some way the musica humana, the ordering of his being, that characterizes the music of the spheres and the prior good state of his soul."⁴ It is curiously appropriate that Caliban is the character who best describes the possibilities suggested by music:

Be not afeared; the isle is full of noises,
 Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
 That if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
 Will make me sleep again, and then, in dreaming,
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches
 Ready to drop upon me, that when I wak'd,
 I cried to dream again.

(III.ii.135-43)

That Caliban, who claims that his only use for language is that he

can curse, delivers this sensitive description of music suggests music's power to radically transform even the basest. We may recall Macrobius' comment on the soul's instinctive response to music:

"Every soul in the world is allured by musical sounds so that not only those who are more refined in their habits, but all the barbarous peoples as well, have adopted songs by which they are inflamed with courage or wooed to pleasure; for the soul carries with it into the body a memory of the music which it knew in the sky, and is so captivated by its charm that there is no breast so cruel or savage as not to be gripped by the spell of such an appeal."⁵

Perhaps because he is an instinctual creature of nature, Caliban for transitory moments comes into harmony with the cosmos. Like Bottom in the arms of Titania, Caliban can experience the freedom and the richness of the cosmos: "The clouds methought would open, and show riches / Ready to drop upon me. . . ." This intersection of the bestial and the celestial underscores the paradox of limitation and freedom that lies at the heart of the play. And so it is that a final hope will be held out even for Caliban at the play's end.

Unlike Sebastian and Antonio, Caliban will repent his folly: "I'll be wise hereafter, And seek for grace" (V.i.295). In Peter Bucknell's illustrations of the early signs of Christianity, "air" is represented by the sign Δ and "earth" by the inverted triangle ∇ . Complete harmony is then symbolized by the combined triangles \boxtimes .⁶ So too, in the experience described by Caliban, air and earth combine. Both the musician Ariel and the auditor Caliban merge to create perfect harmony. And just as Caliban's comfort

depends on the intermingling of earth and air, so too our sense of harmony and freedom comes about as we experience the play's intermingling of sublime music and the comedy of death.

Thus, music is not the only sound within the theater's circumference suggesting our oneness with the universe. Laughter also shows us our potential for freedom. The farcical schemes of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo imitate and neutralize the serious threats to happiness and order enacted in the main plot. The clown episodes work in much the same way as homeopathic ritual magic. Sir James George Frazer tells us that in numerous primitive tribes, darts are thrust into an enemy's effigy in order to wound or kill him and preserve tribal order or one's own life.⁷ In Shakespeare's comedy, the object is not to harm or destroy the enemy but to disarm him. Laughter, rather than pins and darts, therefore, serves to diminish if not dissolve the threat to comic harmony. The impotence of the comical drunkards who wish to kill Prospero and "inherit" his isle thus helps to make impotent, through comic imitation, the power-drunken rogues Sebastian and Antonio, who wish to murder Alonso and usurp Milan. More importantly, the laughter that surrounds Caliban's motley tribe helps to express and diffuse our hostility towards Alonso whose crime against Prospero the merry conspirators also mirror. Sigmund Freud explains how humor and especially caricature become a means of safely avenging wrongs:

. . . tendentious jokes are especially favoured in order to make aggressiveness or criticism possible against persons in exalted positions who claim to exercise authority. The joke then represents a rebellion against that authority, a liberation from its pressure. The

charm of caricatures lies in this same factor: we laugh at them even if they are unsuccessful simply because we count rebellion against authority as a merit.⁸

And while the comedy of death lessens the power of evil associated with majesty and helps to restore the eternal order symbolized by the play's corresponding spheres, it also implies the cyclical pattern of death and life by its antithetical position in relation to order. The period of alienation, dissension, and grief which has lasted for twelve years must come to its lowest ebb before the tide may turn. The cycle must reach its nadir in the despair of Alonso, for out of this symbolic death will come self-knowledge and compassion, the balm to heal the nation's wounds and our own.

The comical confrontation of the Boatswain and Gonzalo, along with the antics of the fools, Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, assures us that the course towards death will also lead to happiness. Our laughter, however, not only suggests our ultimate escape but like music it promotes our escape. For the renaissance, laughter was one of the characteristics distinguishing people from both the angels above and the animals below. Laughter implied the capacity for self-knowledge and compassion. As death brings an awareness of our kinship with others, so too laughter breaks the inelastic boundaries of the ego, allowing us to bond with others. Henri Bergson explains that laughter is primarily a social experience: "Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo. Listen to it carefully: it is not an articulate, clear, well-defined sound; it is something which would fain be prolonged by reverberating from one to another. . . . However spontaneous it seems, laughter always

implies a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughs, real or imaginary."⁹ Thus, our laughter not only reminds us of our own humanity, softening our hostilities and encouraging compassionate feelings towards the characters, but also it helps to bond us to our fellow theater-goers who share in our laughter. The social order which the comedy reestablishes extends with the help of laughter to the circle of the audience and then to the circle of all humankind, for whatever theater we enter to view Shakespeare's plays, we find ourselves mysteriously transported to that Wooden O, the Globe. Laughter and music then, like time and space which measure our mortality, provide unities that bind to liberate.

Corollaries exist in the visual arts of the middle ages and the renaissance to the music and the comedy of The Tempest. They are the Music of the Spheres, which often incorporates the Dance of the Blessed, and the Dance of Death. The Music of the Spheres suggests the sublime while the Dance of Death suggests the comic. Although the traditions are opposed in tone, they both support a similar world view, one that holds the universe to be centered. In both, music and circles are important. In many of the illustrations of celestial music, for example, Christ (sometimes symbolized by the Paschal lamb), the Virgin, or the Lord in Glory provide the axis for the angelic orchestra, chorus, and dancers. In Botticelli's Coronation of the Virgin, for example, angels are shown hand in hand dancing around the coronation figures, Mary and Christ (Fig. 19).¹⁰ And in Giovanni's Madonna with the Girdle, angels again encircle Mary in celebration (Fig. 20).¹¹ While the center of the beatific vision is



Fig. 19. Botticelli, detail from Coronation of the Virgin, Uffizi, Florence



Fig. 20. Matteo di Giovanni, Madonna with the Girdle, The National Gallery, London

most often a celestial character, the center of the Dance of Death is usually the bony figure of sickness or death or the grave. In pictures, such as the anonymous woodcut accompanying the Ballad of the Dance of Death (earlier discussed in relation to Hamlet), the round is composed of men and women, who, as though drawn by the gravitational pull of the grave, take hands with skeletons, who orbit the grave in a merry jig. Although the Dance of the Blessed and the Dance of Death seem at first opposed, since one has as its center a deity or a saint and the other the grave, they both invite their viewer to freedom and fellowship. The woodcut from Hartmann Schedel's Buch der Chroniken (1493) helps to reconcile these two traditions, for in the woodcut, there seem two foci to the angelic chorus (Fig. 21).¹² Concentric circles representing the cosmic spheres surround an orb on which is written "terra." The angels are clustered in rows around the upper portion of the outermost sphere, the "primum mobile." The angels tapering around the lower half of the sphere suggest the centrality of the earth in the cosmic scheme. There appears, however, to be another center to the drawing, for at the top of the illustration the Lord is shown sitting on a throne and holding an orb. The three rows of angels closest to Him have their faces turned towards Him as though to acknowledge that He, rather than the earth, is the true center of the cosmos. Harmony exists between the contrasting centers, for heavenly immortality is only possible when one first recognizes one's position in the cosmos. Focusing on "terra" and the grave are the means to self-knowledge and sublime harmony.

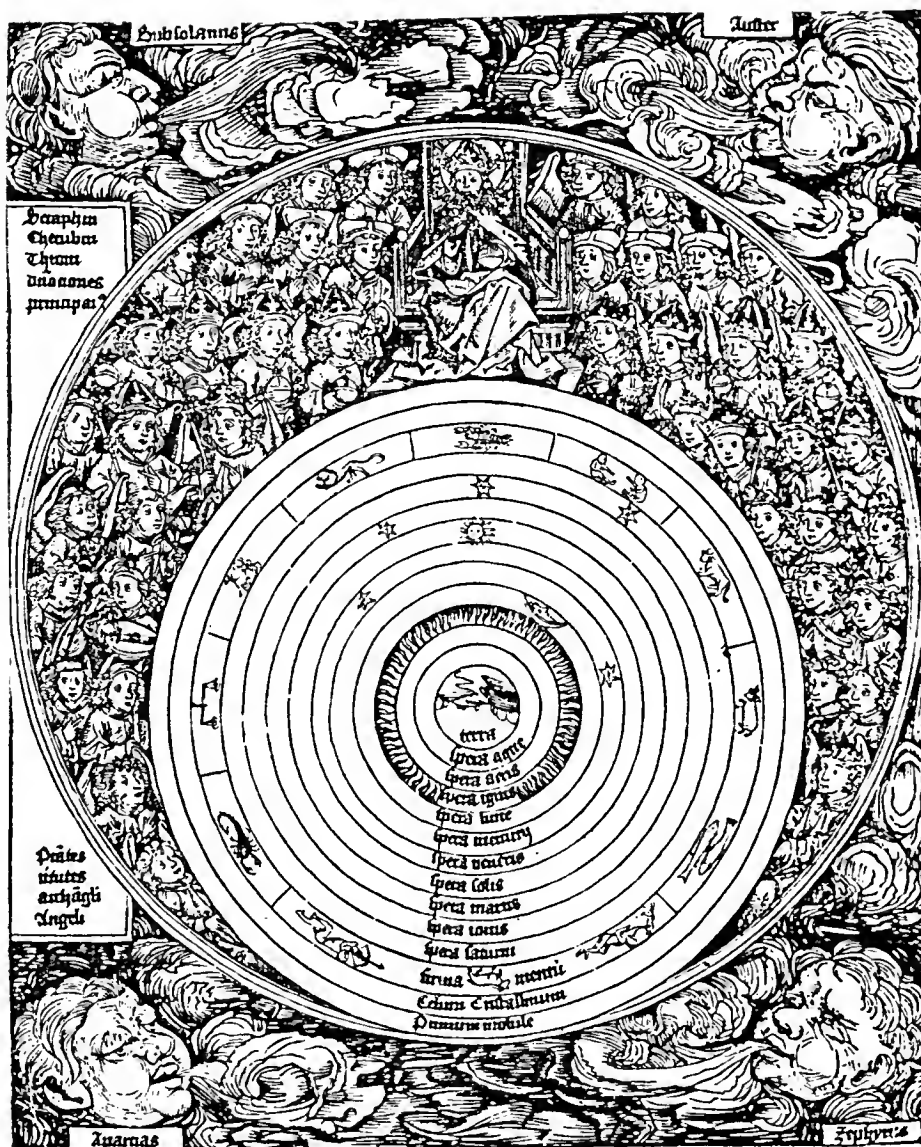


Fig. 21. Woodcut from Hartman Schedel, Buch der Chroniken (1493)

Unlike the still harmony portrayed in the woodcut, The Tempest first dramatizes the conflict between its two centers, death and love. The antithetical moods associated with the island create a tension critical to the regenerative movement. This tension we sense most clearly in the contrasting views of the two loyal courtiers, Gonzalo and Adrian, and the two scoundrels, Antonio and Sebastian. In traditional pastorals, "The shepherd, unlike the saint or the monk, is obsessed by neither temptation nor guilt, and is free from a sense of sin."¹³ Like the shepherds of Arcady, Gonzalo and Adrian envision the island as hospital. Its clime is that "of subtle, tender, and delicate / temperance. . . . The air breathes upon us here most sweetly" (II.i.42-43). Sebastian scoffs at Gonzalo's idealized conception of the isle, "As if it had lungs, and rotten ones", and Antonio pushes the jest further, "Or, as 'twere perfum'd by a fen" (II.i.48,49). To those who are discontented with their place, striving against their mortality for power and freedom, any place they inhabit, whether a Naples or a magical isle, will smell to them like a fen, while for Adrian and Gonzalo, content with their stations, the isle is a second Arcadia. Gonzalo is in fact inspired by the island's freshness to dream of the perfect government, one "T' excel the golden age" (II.i.168). His description is one of pastoral ease, innocence, and simplicity. Unlike Sebastian and Antonio, Gonzalo may within full hearing of Alonso consider his own reign were he a king, for there is no desire for personal power in his imaginings, only a longing for harmony and happiness among the people. As Sebastian and Antonio quickly point out, Gonzalo's

government would make his own kingship obsolete, for Gonzalo has maintained that he would have "no sovereignty" (II.i.157).

Like these opposing views of the good and bad courtiers towards the island, the opposing dispositions of Caliban and Ferdinand regarding their labors and Miranda emphasize the polarities of the human spirit and the pastoral anti-pastoral dialectic. While Caliban tries to break the rules of work and marriage, thus bringing down a host of evils upon his own head, Ferdinand accepts the rules of Prospero and attains his freedom in the arms of Miranda. The sentence of Ferdinand best illustrates the paradox of freedom within bounds. Robert Herrick's "Upon a black twist, rounding the Arm of the Countess of Carlile" may help to illustrate the kind of freedom Ferdinand experiences in the presence of Miranda, for Herrick's speaker links the paradox of liberty within bounds to the theme of romantic love:

I Saw about her spotlesse wrist,
Of blackest silk, a curious twist;
Which, circumvolving gently, there
Enthrall'd her Arme, as Prisoner.
Dark was the Jayle; but as if light
Had met t'engender with the night;
To shew at once, both night and day.
I fancie more! but if there be
Such Freedome in Captivity;
I beg of Love, that ever I
May in like Chains of Darknesse lie.¹⁴

Here the jet band, an emblem of captivity, night, and death (la petite mort) provides a foil to the beautiful white arm, making the arm more radiant by contrast and binding the speaker in love. So too Ferdinand, according to Prospero, will treasure his love more dearly

when it is set in contrast with his labors. Ferdinand, like the Countess' arm and the Countess' lover may find perfect freedom within bounds. It is this freedom that Ferdinand describes when he first meets Miranda:

Might I but through my prison once a day
Behold this maid. All corners else o' th' earth
Let liberty make use of; space enough
Have I in such a prison.

(I.ii.491-94)

Ferdinand bows to the inevitable hardships imposed by Prospero and by submitting finds in his love for Miranda a new kind of liberty. The labors suggest mortal limitations and the paradoxical truth that liberty lies in acquiescing to natural, social, and spiritual laws. It is no coincidence that Ferdinand must perform the labors of the most mortal of creatures Caliban, for Ferdinand no less than Caliban must experience the hardships of his race. The two are rivals for Miranda and they fare in their attempts to attain her in relation to their ability to abide within the boundaries set by her father. Marriage is the boundary wherein sexuality is set free. Caliban, who would break not only the laws of marriage but would abuse the free will of Miranda, finds himself a slave, while Ferdinand, who promises to restrain his passion until the formal rites of marriage are finished, will experience the joy of Miranda. Poggioli explains that "The bucolic imagination equates happiness with the fulfillment of the passion of love, with the consummation of man's erotic wishes; and identifies unhappiness with the rejection or denial of one's heart's desire, in brief, with unrequited love."¹⁵ Ferdinand's love

is indeed requited, but as is consistent with the Christian bucolic it is a fulfillment made possible by acknowledging the boundaries of social contract.

The dual character of the isle and the opposing dispositions of its inhabitants reflect the antithetical possibilities open to us. Ariel and Caliban are clearly symbols of this psychological dialectic and the wedding masque and the Calibanian antimasque provide still another variant of the play's oppositions. Alonso and Prospero stand precariously in the middle. They are neither idealized like their children Ferdinand and Miranda and the spirit Ariel nor are they complete fools and scoundrels like Caliban, Trinculo, Stephano, Antonio and Sebastian. The freedom that is possible for Alonso and Prospero and for us is not the freedom of Eden, freedom from death, but the freedom of Abel and Cain before the first murder. The pastoral world is reminiscent of Eden, for its land is always beautiful and bountiful and its people free from envy and greed. They are not, however, immortal. Arcady is a better world than our own, but not a perfect world.¹⁶ Unlike the shepherds of the traditional pastoral the central characters of The Tempest, Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio are anything but free from envy. The royal houses of Naples and Milan are tainted by a heinous crime, one which shadows the world's first murder, a crime of brother against brother. Because Prospero's and Miranda's deaths were averted, an opportunity exists to cleanse and restore the kingdom before the death of old King Alonso. Like a motion picture director, Shakespeare and his assisting magician Prospero attempt to rewind and

edit the film, taking us back spiritually to the land east of Eden, before the first cities, before the first act of bloodshed. Poggioli explains that "the Christian pastoral poet will treat as exemplary the story of Cain and Abel, where the latter, who is 'a keeper of sheep,' is blessed with God's grace, and the former, who is a tiller of soil, is cursed by God's wrath; nor will he fail to notice that it was the latter who brought both crime and civilization into this world, first by slaying his brother, and then by becoming the first builder of cities."¹⁷ Since innocence has been lost by a symbolic murder, it must be regained through a symbolic sacrifice. Alonso, the King of Naples, from the play's first scene becomes the primary subject for sacrifice. As Alonso begins his psychological descent, comical actions suggest not only his fall but also a parallel movement upwards, an emerging regenerative energy.

Shortly before the royal passengers jump ship in Act I, Antonio cries, "We are merely cheated of our lives by drunkards" (i.56). These words, along with the comical retorts of Gonzalo to the irreverent Boatswain and the general confusion aboard ship, suggest a resemblance between this royal vessel and Sebastian Brant's Ship of Fools whose passengers likewise fear shipwreck because they cannot maintain control when besieged by life's tempests:

We'll suffer ship wreck, plain to see
 Mast, sail, and rope will shattered be

 The ship and all will drown
 When once it's sunk with all of them
 For we lack sense and strategem
 To swim ashore and leave the deck.

 And probably a gale will follow

Both ship and passengers to swallow
 Help, counsel wise from us have fled
 And finally we'll all be dead.¹⁸

Unlike Brant's Narrenschiff, however, the Neapolitan ship has one good, though somewhat addled, counselor on board, and it is this advisor who speaks the play's first comforting words and introduces the idea of sacrifice. Although gale winds threaten to sink the bark, Gonzalo ironically sees hope in the impertinent Boatswain who regards his life above all others, even the King's:

I have great comfort from this fellow. Me thinks he hath no drowning mark upon him; his complexion is perfect gallows. Stand fast, good Fate, to his hanging, make the rope of his destiny our cable, for our own doth little advantage. If he be not born to be hang'd our case is miserable.

(I.i.28-33)

Gonzalo humorously suggests that the rascal's guilt and consequent hanging may serve to save the royal passengers. The Boatswain shall, Gonzalo hopes, play the scapegoat; his rebellious spirit so like the storm's, may paradoxically provide the antidote to destruction. This comical treatment of the ideas of sacrifice and salvation is appropriate, for the Boatswain poses no real threat to social stability. Like the liberty of festival time that is limited by the occasion, the Boatswain's license is relegated to the brief duration of the storm. He, no more than the three comical conspirators Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, has the power to overturn order. Indeed, the Boatswain's guilt has nothing to do with the crew's safe delivery. The appointed scapegoat is Alonso who prays below. The

current King of Naples, for assisting Antonio's usurpation of Prospero's dukedom in Milan, will be punished by hearing that his son is dead. Ariel, in the form of a Harpy, pronounces Alonso's sentence in Act III: "Thee of thy son, Alonso, / They have bereft; and do pronounce by me / Ling'ring perdition (worse than any death / Can be at once)" (iii.75-78).

In many ancient and some present day cultures, the old tribal king is ritually slaughtered, sometimes by his successor, as in the case of the King of Calicut,¹⁹ who then replaces him as king so that the land might be revitalized by its magical association with the young ruler. Mockery and playfulness often accompany these rites of death. Abuse was important in leveling the king, providing a kind of foreplay to death, while light-hearted merriment attested to the liberating power inherent in the sacrifice. Like the sacrificial ritual, the play world of The Tempest presents us with the symbolic dethroning of the old and worn King Alonso, and the coronation of his son, symbolized by his betrothal to Miranda. And with the instigation of the new rule comes for us the audience a sense of rejuvenation and liberty.

From the first scene, Alonso becomes the object of abuse and scorn. The Boatswain's order to Alonso, "I pray now, keep below" and his comments to Gonzalo, "What cares these roarers for the name of king?" and "None that I more love than myself" (I.i.11,16-17,20) suggest Alonso's diminishing authority. Nature, with the help of Prospero, is set against the authority of the King. As the Boatswain's impertinent remarks hint at Alonso's lack of support

among the commoners, Sebastian's response to Antonio's cry, "Let's all sink wi' th' King" (I.i.63), suggests the disaffection of the nobility. Sebastian cries, "Let's take leave of him" (64). The humor of this opening scene, like the mixture of contemptuous wit and light-hearted gaiety of ancient fertility rites, suggests both death and liberty. The Boatswain's anarchic spirit contrasts the benevolent wit of Gonzalo. Significantly, Gonzalo, rather than the Boatswain, Antonio, or Sebastian, has the last word in the scene: "Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground, long heath, brown furze, any thing. The wills above be done! but I would fain die a dry death" (I.i.65-68). Gonzalo's humorous appeal for land at this critical moment offers us hope not only that the company will reach shore safely, but also that a feeling of safety and celebration shall end the play.

As in this scene, so also throughout the play, the interlacing of sardonic humor and light-hearted mirth helps us to sense the affinity of death and life. The contemptuous wit of Antonio and Sebastian in Act II, scene i, directed particularly at Gonzalo, who is attempting to comfort the King for the loss of his son, points to the scornors' malicious character. Cynical laughter clearly links with villainy and death, for just when the King and his good companions fall asleep, the scornful humorists begin seriously contemplating regicide. The ridicule of Gonzalo, the King's counselor and strongest supporter, is only one step removed from bold mockery of the King himself. Indeed, Sebastian, puffed up by his goading of Gonzalo, approaches open defiance when he criticizes the

King for giving his daughter in marriage to an African. Sebastian's callous suggestion that the King's error caused Ferdinand's death prompts Gonzalo to correct him: "My Lord Sebastian, / The truth you speak doth lack some gentleness, / And time to speak it in: you rub the sore, / When you should bring the plaster" (II.i.137-39). Unable to refrain from punning at Gonzalo's expense, Antonio seconds the thrust of his friend: "And most chirurgonly" (141). The cynical courtiers find much material for their wit in Gonzalo's musings on the ideal commonwealth. Sebastian's and Antonio's scornful laughter both inflates their pride and lowers in their own and in our estimate the power and stature of their King. The mocking games thus end in raised swords, poised to fall on the old King and his friend. While contemptuous mockery indicates the decline of Alonso, his debasement and descent towards death, the buffoonery of the comical triumvirate, Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, indicates a rising current of hope.

The comical conspiracy serves a regenerative purpose by linking the various characters of the play, particularly Alonso and Prospero. This merging of identities makes it possible for Alonso and Prospero to embrace one another at the play's close and for us to forgive Alonso. Like the Dance of Death that forces opposing factions to take hands, the comedy of death in The Tempest dissolves the distinctions between tyrant and victim and encourages the joining of hands. Caliban's conspiracy to kill Prospero most obviously parodies Sebastian and Antonio's plot to kill Alonso, but it also mirrors a treacherous deed performed in that "dark backward and abysm of time" (I.ii.50) in which Alonso played the culprit rather than the

victim. The distinction between tyrant and victim also blurs in the case of Prospero. As Caliban bitterly recalls, the island was usurped by Prospero: "This island's mine by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou takst from me" (I.ii.331-32). When Caliban calls himself the rightful king, "For I am all the subjects that you have, / Which first was mine own king" (I.ii.341-42), we are reminded that Prospero has usurped not only the power of King Caliban but also that of King Alonso. The Boatswain's order that the royal party stay below deck takes on added significance, for it is Prospero's tempest that has turned hierarchy topsy-turvy. As the play progresses, we become more and more aware of Prospero's power over Alonso. Prospero indeed renders the King completely helpless by having Ariel tell him the most hurtful of lies, that he is responsible for his son's death.

Caliban's language as well points to the cruelty and harsh justice of Prospero that links him with the culprit/victim Alonso. Complaining bitterly of imprisonment and torture in Act I, scene ii, the monster is both pitiable and contemptible. We might look on him compassionately for an instant, pitying him as we pitied Ariel who also pleaded for freedom. Our sympathy gives way to disgust, however, when we hear that Caliban had planned to rape Miranda and that he bears no remorse for his thoughts, but rather wishes his plans had succeeded: "O ho, O ho, would't had been done! . . . I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (349-51). Miranda's description of Caliban as an "abhorred slave, which any print of goodness will not take" (I.ii.352-53) now seems fitting, for Caliban possesses no self-knowledge and has no desire to change. Although

the monster is powerless in and of himself, we experience him as vaguely threatening, for in Prospero, we see something of Caliban. The dialogue between Miranda and Caliban suggests the reflectiveness of language, language mirroring the goodness or the baseness of the speaker. In the case of Caliban, language profits him only in that he now can curse: "The red-plague rid you / For learning me your language!" (I.ii.363-64).

Shrugs't thou, malice?
If thou neglects't, or dost unwillingly
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps
Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar,
That beasts shall tremble at thy din.

(I.ii.368-71)

Even though it is as harsh and coarse as any words spoken by Caliban, the second speech is Prospero's. We might forgive Prospero for speaking harshly to the monster, agreeing with him that Caliban is one "Whom stripes may move, not kindness" (I.ii.344), but we cannot ignore his caustic words to tender-hearted Ariel, "Thou liest, malignant thing!" (I.ii.258). Prospero seems to delight in terrifying the harmless sprite. Relishing each detail of the torments of Sycorax, Prospero then warns Ariel that should he so much as murmur, "I will rend an oak, / And peg thee in his knotty entrails, till / Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters" (I.ii.294-96). If language reflects the condition of the soul, then indeed we have something to fear by the affinity of Prospero's language to Caliban's. For the magician, unlike Caliban, possesses immense powers for good and evil. Herbert Weisinger suggests that

there is a moment in tragedy when we are held in suspense, skepticism and faith being present in equal measure. We both hope and doubt that the hero, like the god-king in ritual and myth will transcend his death and that order will be restored.²⁰ This opening act functions in some way like this moment in tragedy. We see signs of hope in Prospero's orders for the safe-keeping of the ship and its royal cargo and in Prospero's loving care for his daughter. But we are skeptical too, for we sense in Prospero a hardness inimical to the comic spirit. This first appearance of Caliban thus offers no humor, for the monster's function is to stress the tragic possibilities of the pastoral. It is when Caliban becomes a comical figure in Act II, scene ii, that we begin to lose our skepticism and gather faith.

It is significant that Caliban does not emerge as a laughable figure until he meets Stephano and Trinculo, for the union of Alonso's butler and fool with Prospero's slave, like the union of Alonso's son and Prospero's daughter, foreshadows the reconciliation of the King and the Duke. Both the masque, which celebrates the love of Miranda and Ferdinand, and the antimasque, the laughable attempts of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo to overturn order, maintain Prospero and Alonso's merged identities. Like the Dance of the Blessed, the masque affirms the concept of hierarchy as central to harmony and life. The court masque, according to David Woodman, "reinforced [the] concept of the king as a symbol of divine power and the giver of fertility and prosperity--the tribal role once filled by the white magician or witch doctor. As the grip of white magic on

the public imagination relaxed (the focus on magic shifted to witch trials), the king, as it were, absorbed the role of white magician." In The Tempest, the magician takes back the power of maintaining order. It is Prospero rather than Alonso who presides over both the masque and the play. But just as the masque demonstrates Prospero's desire for harmony, it restores symbolically the true power of the King. For the images of Alonso and Prospero converge through the celebration honoring the union of what is most precious to them, Miranda and Ferdinand.

Critics have compared the disruption of the masque by Caliban's clumsy crew to the antimasque in which witches, satyrs, beasts and monsters attempt to destroy the order of the gods. The antimasque suggests the anarchic elements inherent in any system of order and the power of the monarchy to contain or deactivate such disruptive tendencies. The comical conspiracy, however, does more than represent a weak threat to the celestial harmony imaged by Prospero. It serves to promote Prospero's and our own self-knowledge and to complete the identification of King and magician begun in the masque. While the masque blends what is highest and most worthy in the men, the antimasque unites what is most base. Alonso encounters his mortality when he realizes that he is responsible for his son's death: "it did base my trespass. / Therefore my son i' th' ooze is bedded; and / I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded, / And with him there lie mudded" (III.iii.99-102). Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio are then for their own protection charmed to remain in the "line grove [sic]" (V.i.10) that Ariel tells us protects Prospero's

cell from bad weather. The aptness of this double use of the grove for protection, both for Alonso's and for Prospero's, may remind us of Caliban and Trinculo in Act II, shivering together under the gaberdine. As the three distracted nobles stand transfixed in the sphere wrought by Ariel, we recall the comical conspirators who, drawn by the music of Ariel, find themselves prancing in a foul lake. Ariel describes them to Prospero, "I' th' filthy-mantled pool beyond your cell, / There dancing up to the chins" (IV.i.182-83). And as we envision this comical variant of the Dance of Death, the tragic possibilities of Alonso's despair become less threatening.

Prospero too is mirrored in the folly of the clowns. But unlike Alonso, Prospero is aware of the activities of the rascals and recognizes the relationship between the conspirators and himself. As Prospero watches the sublime performance of the masque, he remembers that he will soon be called to join in another dance: "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (IV.i.156-58). Perhaps the sicklemen, called to dance with the nymphs, serve to remind Prospero of Caliban's nearness and of his own mortality. The dance of the nymphs and the reapers, like Schels' woodcut, suggests the importance of placing our attention on the grave as well as on perfection.

Alonso and Prospero become even more closely identified during the farcical coronation of King Stephano. As the greedy conspirators irreverently snatch from the line the mantle of royalty, they reduce Alonso's usurpation to the clumsy action of a petty thief:

Trin. O King Stephano! O peer! O worthy Stephano!
 look what a wardrobe here is for thee!
 Cal. Let it alone, thou fool, it is but trash.
 Trin. O, ho, monster! we know what belongs to a
 frippery. O King Stephano!
 Step. Put off that gown, Trinculo; by his hand, I'll
 have that gown.
 Trin. Thy Grace shall have it.

(IV.i.222-26)

Trinculo's insistence on the name "King" reminds us of Alonso, while the fact that Stephano's realm is to be the isle and that the clothes belong to Prospero brings to mind its present sovereign, Prospero. Caliban's constant reminder, "we shall lose our time" also parodies the magician's obsession with his art and his desire to control. The contention among the three rascals suggests the ridiculousness of all human endeavors to escape the bonds of nature.

The coronation of Stephano not only points to the folly of Alonso and Prospero, and, of course, to Sebastian and Antonio, it parallels the symbolic coronation of Ferdinand and Miranda. Indeed, the last act draws Caliban and Miranda together in several ways. When Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano wearing their stolen apparel come before Alonso and his men, Caliban expresses his amazement at the sight of the Europeans, "O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed!" (V.i.261). His words, echoing Miranda's "O brave new world" (V.i.183) connect for us the ideas of nurture (symbolized by Miranda) and nature (symbolized by Caliban). Language, which in Act I, seemed to reveal Caliban as totally depraved and completely unrelated to the chaste maiden, here joins them as they must be joined in the mind of Prospero. Two other phrases connecting Caliban and Miranda further

emphasize this relationship. In Act IV, scene i, Trinculo warns Caliban that should Stephano be displeased with him, "[He] wert but a lost monster" (203). The theme of loss is then taken up by Prospero when he tells Alonso, "I / Have lost my daughter" (V.i.147-48). While Ferdinand and Miranda represent what is highest and best in their fathers, Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban are like their bad children suggesting what is worst. All children, good and bad, however, must be recognized in order for the royal families to become reconciled.

Thus Alonso's descent, which is marked by despair and insanity, parallels Prospero's, which is one of profound sadness. Yet this sadness, like Alonso's distraction, brings self-knowledge and hope. Prospero after watching the ridiculous posturing of King Stephano and his motley court, comments on his own lack of sympathy for those who have wronged him:

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their affliction, and shall not myself
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?

(V.i.21-24)

With this thought of the common natures of the King, his brother, Sebastian, and himself, Prospero forgives his enemies, releases the tormented men, and pledges to break his staff. There is a mingling of grief and joy in Prospero's acceptance of the future, for the act of giving up one's life study is itself a kind of death. Yet Prospero knows that he must relinquish his power in order to obtain power. He is not exempt from the laws that rule all of the other

human beings of the play. In three ways Prospero demonstrates his acquiescence to time and death at the play's end. He buries and drowns his symbols of power, in effect, relinquishing the strength of his middle years; he gives his only child Miranda, who was his sole companion for sixteen years, to Ferdinand so that she may begin her adult life; and he accepts his relationship to the monster Caliban, "this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (V.i.275). "Terra," the earthy Caliban, is paradoxically the center that offers Prospero and us freedom. When Prospero states, "Every third thought shall be my grave" (V.i.312), he is not being morbid but rather opening his arms to the future which for him holds some sadness and much joy. His acceptance of the cycle of nature and of his place in nature is the "tempering" that Boethius describes as essential for "musica humana." This tuning of the body and the soul, is necessary before one can extend and accept love, it is necessary for cosmic harmony, for "musica mundana." In Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony, Leo Spitzer explains the renaissance conception of order as love:

. . . more characteristic, perhaps, of the Christians than their interest in the dogmatic harmonizing of ancient and Christian thought, was their emphasis on feeling, particularly the feeling of caritas. The text par excellence that illustrates the correspondence between music and Christian love is I Cor. 23, I (sic. I. Cor. 13, I): "si linguis hominum loquar, et Angelorum caritatem autem non habeam, factus sum velut aes sonans, aut cymbalum tinniens." Only through charity can man reach true music. According to the Pythagoreans, it was cosmic order which was identifiable with music; according to Christian philosophers, it was love. And in the ordo amoris of Augustine we have evidently a blend of the Pagan and the Christian themes: henceforth "order" is love.²¹

Prospero's forgiveness of Alonso sets right the natural order that was first upset by his creation of the tempest. Tempest becomes "temperament." The Boatswain's joyous words near the play's end, "The best news is, that we have safely found / Our king . . . " (V.i.221-22) affirms the new order and the renewed power of the King. Prospero at last frees Ariel, and the loosing of his "dainty" spirit symbolizes hope and freedom.

Just as Prospero has freed Ariel, Prospero offers us in the epilogue an opportunity to free him and in doing so to free ourselves. The final lines remind us to remember our mortality: "As you from crimes would pardon'd be, / Let your indulgence set me free." We now hold the magician's wand and may either confine Prospero "in this bare island" (8) or by filling his sails with our applause send him to Naples. We now have the power to charm, the power of caritas or love. Our applause, a gesture of approval and good will works like laughter to both bind and free. It unites the audience in a common cause, the liberation of Prospero, and affirms both the triumph of his and our own spirits over death.

The Tempest thus incorporates the tragic and yet moves beyond the tragic to fulfill the promise of complete restoration suggested by the early comedies. Shakespeare's romances indeed complement his festive plays, for as the early comedies emphasize the child's courage in breaking parental bonds, the late comedies stress the parent's courage in separating from their children, which then allows for the child's return. Crucial to both comedies is the paradox that only by letting go of the past and accepting our own place in nature

can we recover our inner child and defer our own death. The tragicomedies and the tragedies are important to this process of escape and return, for they emphasize the terror of separation. While the tragicomedies treat the willful, overly dependent child, who resists the responsibilities of adulthood, the tragedies indicate the parents' part in impeding maturation. The deaths of Romeo, Juliet, Hamlet, and Cordelia show the fate of the child who is not esteemed. The abandonment and gruesome on-stage slaughter of Macduff's son in Macbeth epitomizes the hostile environment for spiritual growth that is found in the tragedies. The boy's jests on the topic of his father's absence, Lady Macduff's bitter indictment of her husband, and the assassin's brutal slaying of the child indicate not merely a sterile, unnurturing climate but one that is actively destructive. While the quibbles of Macduff's son, like those of Shakespeare's tragic antics, place in relief the absence of gaiety and warmth in the tragic world, they also implant in us a hope that innocence may in the future be recovered. As we watch the death of the boy, we remember that his father was also represented by the image of a bloody child, a babe "untimely ripp'd" (V.viii.16) from his mother's womb. But the second child in the apparition, who visually opposes the bloody one, is crowned and holds in his hand a tree. The tree both foreshadows Malcolm's victory at Dunsinane and symbolizes royalty and fertility. Amazed and frightened by the child's regal presence, Macbeth inquires, "What is this / That rises like the issue of a king, / And wears upon his baby-brow the round / And top of sovereignty?" (IV.i.87-90). As in Macbeth so also in

Shakespeare's tragedies in general, hope lies not in the continuation of the hero's line but in the future regime. The laughter and gaiety that surfaces at poignant moments thus enhances the value of isolated symbols of rebirth, such as the image of the crowned child in Macbeth. While in the tragedies the hero or heroine's death marks the end of his or her family's power if not the end of the family altogether, in the late comedies the child is banished or lost only to be in the end more joyfully embraced. In these late plays, the family thus triumphs over death, and our laughter, as it is frequent, stresses this sense of continuity and, as it is joyful, celebrates the return of spring, the journey through death to rebirth.

Notes

¹Poggioli, p. 150.

²David Woodman, White Magic and English Renaissance Drama (London: Associated Univ. Presses, Inc., 1973), pp. 30-31.

³John Hollander, The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry 1500-1700 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), p. 25.

⁴Hollander, pp. 30-31.

⁵Macrobius, Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, trans. W. H. Stahl (Columbia Univ. Press: New York, 1952), p. 195. Hollander includes this excerpt in his discussion of heavenly harmony, p. 30.

⁶Peter A. Bucknell, Entertainment and Ritual: 600-1600 (London: Stainer and Bell, 1979), p. 45.

⁷Sir James George Frazer, The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings (Vol. I), Part I of The Golden Bough (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1963), pp. 55-70.

⁸Sigmund Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1960), p. 105.

⁹Henri Bergson, "Laughter" in Comedy (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), pp. 35-40.

¹⁰Kathi Meyer-Baer, p. 136.

¹¹Meyer-Baer, pp. 166-167.

¹²Meyer-Baer, p. 2.

¹³Poggioli, p. 153.

¹⁴Robert Herrick, Hesperides in The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1963), p. 94.

¹⁵Poggioli, p. 57.

¹⁶Poggioli, p. 170. "We know that pastoral characters are not immortal but mortal; and that Arcadia is inhabited by human beings only a little better and happier than we are."

¹⁷Poggioli, p. 161.

¹⁸Sebastian Brant, The Ship of Fools, trans. Edwin H. Zeydel (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1944), p. 353.

¹⁹Frazer, The Dying God, Part III of The Golden Bough, pp. 47-48.

²⁰Weisinger, pp. 66, 266-268.

²¹Leo Spitzer, Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prologomena to an Interpretation of the Word "Stimmung," ed. Anna Granville Hatcher (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), p. 19.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

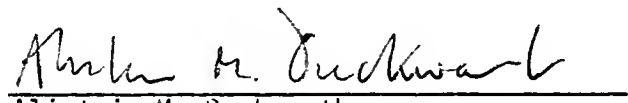
Catherine Cox was born in Albertville, Alabama, in 1949, and lived in the small city of Boaz until her graduation from high school in 1968. She received her bachelor's degree in English from the University of Alabama in 1972. Her Master of Arts was awarded to her by the same institution in May, 1975. She then moved to Orlando, Florida, where she taught English at Lyman High School from 1973 to 1976 and at Valencia Community College from 1976 to 1977. Her graduate studies at the University of Florida began in the summer of 1977. She taught as a graduate assistant during her final year of study. Catherine has many interests and hobbies, particularly horseback riding, swimming, dining at fine restaurants, and playing bridge.

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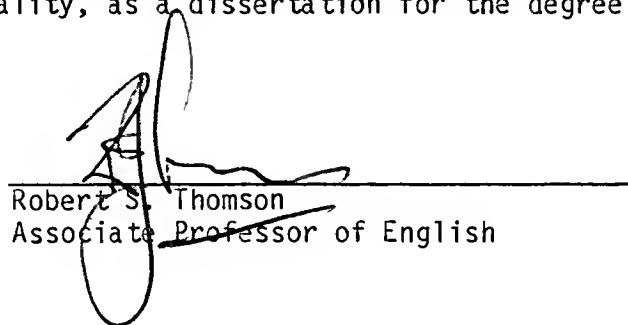
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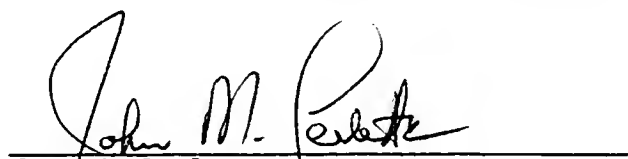
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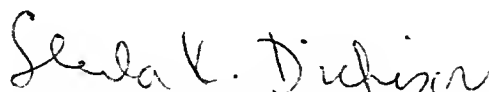
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